'He made at the undetected swindler as if to embrace his legs.'

JOSEPH'S COAT

BY

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With TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS by FRED. BARNARD

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1881

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

ILLUSTRATIONS TO VOL. II.

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CHAPTER XIV.

If Master George Banks had known everything, he might have held himself from that disgusted cry against the treason of his sweetheart. It was that cry which sealed his mother's lips and kept the simple case of forgery from becoming in its way a *cause célèbre*. It is somewhat curious to reflect on what would have happened had Dinah declared her secret in open court. For I have not the slightest doubt that if George had heard the story, he would have struck out for this new ark of refuge, and would have sworn through thick and thin that he had been aware of his own identity all along. I was telling George's

17

story over a pipe to a distinguished novelist, a friend of mine, last Saturday at a little convivial gathering, and the distinguished novelist—who is also a barrister—was a little puzzled at first sight to say what might have become of the prisoner had this revelation been made. He seemed firmly of opinion, however, that the onus would have lain upon old George, and that he would have found it very difficult indeed to prove that his grand-nephew had not known the truth. In any case, it would have altered the face of things. If my opinion is of any value on a point which is not altogether technical, I venture to offer it. Young George would still have been committed to take his trial at the assizes. Old George would have been bound over to appear against him. Bail would have been found for the criminal, a compromise about the fortune would have been arrived at, the old man would have forfeited his recognisances, and the younger scoundrel would have been shipped abroad somewhere with at least an ample supply of money in his pouch.

And all this would have come to a man who had already consented to be a cur, if he had only refrained from going still lower in creation's scale, and growing downwards into the similitude of a snake.

But when he cried out that Ethel also was in the lie against him, even his mother who had loved him so wiped him clean out of her heart, and left him to his fate. It was hard to do, but it was yet more hard to have to do it. For she loved him yet, her son—scamp and hound as he had proved—still, he was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, and he was Joe's son, and she had borne him and had gone in travail for him. There is but one divine thing in the world, and it is motherhood and the motherly nature, for they are one.

So he went on his way, cur-like enough, and left hearts behind him to bleed and suffer after the manner of his tribe.

Ethel, you will remember, fell into Dinah's arms at that cruel charge her lover brought against her. But she heard the words, and they came to mind again afterwards. 'The

child I bore!' groaned poor Dinah as she rose, and Ethel's mind, too staggered and stunned to heed them at the time, recalled them later on.

Dinah was middle-aged, and had suffered a great deal already. *She* did not faint, having still somebody left to endure for, but she put Ethel into a four-wheeled hackney coach and saw her home. For Mrs. Donne had been so enraged at the whole thing that she refused to accompany her daughter on that terrible journey, or to have any part or lot in the matter. It is the way of women to show this curious injustice sometimes, by way of set-off to the amazing injustice which they often do themselves. The mother did not, as you may fancy, offer any very friendly welcome to the sister of the man who had so shamefully wrecked her household peace, and had left the first blot upon the house she had ever heard of amongst all its homely legends. To have had stolen money in the house and in her daughter's hands! You may easily believe it to have been very bitter to the yeoman's widow, whc

was honest, as all her forbears had been, to the backbone.

'We brought shame an' sorrow to this house,' said Dinah sadly, when Ethel was put to bed and she was ready to go away again. 'But you won't forbid me to come and see her to-morrow, will you?'

There was something in Dinah's face which repressed the tart answer on Mrs. Donne's tongue.

'You're i' trouble as much as we be, my dear,' she answered—'worse trouble than we be—an' I'm sorry for you i' my heart. Come, an' welcome.'

At this Dinah broke into tears, the first she had shed that heavy day.

'The shame ain't yourn, my poor dear creetur,' said the yeoman's widow, 'not more than it's ourn. But I doubt me an' my poor gell 'll be able to live here longer. An' I *did* hope to lay *my* bones i' Quarrymoor churchyard along of ourn's.'

'Ourn'—'ours'—hers—was the last John Audley Donne, the latest of a long and honour-

able race: and she also must needs weep a little to think that she and he might lie wide apart.

'Oh,' said Dinah, 'if you go away, let me come wi' you! No,' she said a second later, through her tears, 'I should keep your trouble an' your shame i' your minds, an' I'm best away. But if you'll let me, I'll look in to-morrow, an' see how she is, poor thing.'

'It's a sad house to ask anybody to come to,' said Ethel's mother. 'But come if you will, an' welcome. How does your father bear it?'

'It's broke his heart,' answered Dinah. 'He'll never hold his head up any more.'

If it seem strange that Mrs. Donne took George's guilt for granted so early, you may remember that she took her cue from his sister, as she and the rest of the world supposed Dinah to be. And Dinah had always the affair of the cash-box in her mind, and that left everything without need of proof.

The two women parted with a kiss.

'Yourn's a worse trouble than ourn,' said

the yeoman's widow. 'God help you to bear it!'

'God bless you!' answered Dinah, and so went her way. The Saracen's doors were closed, the Saracen's affairs were wound up, within a week of the assize trial. Daniel held his head low for very shame, but on the aged a blow of this kind sometimes falls with comparative lightness. It is not experience alone which enables age to bear its troubles easily. The old beat has gone out of the pulse, the heart is dulled to pain. Daniel none the less would get away from the scene of this disgrace, and to him also it was a grief to lay his bones among strangers. But he could no longer endure to live where everybody had known him, and where an honest name had been his pride and boast so long.

Mrs. Donne's lawyer had news for her when she consulted him about the advisability of parting with the farm.

'I can find you a tenant in a week,' he answered her. 'But unless I'm mistaken, it won't be a farm much longer.'

'Not a farm!' cried Mrs. Donne. 'Why not? I couldn't abear to think of its bein' built over.'

'Well, you know, that's as you like, of course, but I dare say you have heard that coal has just been proved on the Hilly Piece, and that's as good as proving it at Quarrymoor, Mrs. Donne. And, in point of fact, the land'll be worth five or six times what it was directly the new pits get well to work. Rent it out by all means, since you want to, but keep it in your own hands for a little time at least. If I'm not very much mistaken, there's a big fortune underneath, a bigger fortune than all the Donnes ever got out of the surface—long as they farmed it!'

'Do you know of anybody as'll take it?' asked Mrs. Donne.

'Well, I'm not certain,' said the man of business, 'but Sir Sydney Cheston has got it into his head that he'd like to try his hand at farming, and he has commissioned me to look out for a farm for him. I shall make an offer of Quarrymoor, if you're agreeable.'

'Oh dear, yes,' said Mrs. Donne; 'I'm agreeable. And it'll be nicer to have a gentleman as won't mind laying a bit out on the land.'

'He'll be a good tenant,' said the lawyer. 'Old Sir Sydney left him wonderfully well-to-do, all things considered, and it's been a fortune to him to find coal on the Staffordshire property, of course. He can afford to spend a thousand or two on high farming if he wants to.'

'An' you think there's coal under Quarry-moor?' inquired Mrs. Donne.

'I know there is,' the lawyer answered; 'as well as if I'd been there. Hold it for a year or two, Mrs. Donne, and there's a big fortune in it.'

This was news indeed, and now Ethel was really an heiress. It was surprising to see how poor young George was buffeted by the wings of the unattainable. He had this last blow yet to feel, but another, almost as severe, had already fallen.

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of his trial, and he was under the hands of a barber

who wore a belt and carried a bunch of keys at it. Another man, who also wore a belt with a bunch of keys at it, stood by the while.

'What's the news?' asked the barber, as George's well groomed-locks fell beneath his shears.

'Well,' said the other; 'the news is, for one thing, as you owe me two and a tanner.'

'Oh,' said the barber-warder, suspending the action of the shears, 'and what might that be for?'

'I see a telegram message half an hour ago,' said the idle warder. 'Erebus is in first, my boy.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' responded the barber, pausing to look at his companion before he fell to work again. 'I'd ha' bet my shirt again' him.'

'Well, he's won, whatever you'd ha' bet,' said the idle warder with a little laugh. 'You'll see it for yourself in the morning papers.'

Now, this was cruel for George. What right has a felon to anything? And yet, he

had fairly won the money which would have saved him, and his calculations had been sound after all, but for that one abominable accident which had tripped him up and maimed him for ever and for ever. When the prison chaplain talked to George about the enormity of his offence, he found him impenitent and stubborn; until the young man, though more than half by accident, adopted a wiser method, and assumed a virtue though he had it not, in consideration of the chaplain's influence.

Of course, neither Mrs. Donne nor Ethel were at this time much in the mood to enjoy an accession of fortune, immediate or remote. They were driven from home by shame, and had little care to think about monetary prosperities. Old Daniel was driven away also; and four people, who had seemed rooted to the soil they were born on, went away together and took one and the same goal. Trouble had brought Dinah and Ethel close together, and had made them fast friends.

'You're sure, my dear,' said Dinah, 'that I sha'n't be a trouble to you if I come to live

anywhere near you? I shall mind you of it every time you look at me.'

'I should like you to be with me,' Ethel answered steadily and gently. 'Let us go together, and never say a word about it any more.'

And so the ugly thing was buried; but they thought about it, though they both kept silence. Daniel was willing to go anywhere, so long as he was but led out of the sight of eyes in whose gaze he had been familiar.

'I've never been a don at travellin',' said Daniel, 'an' I'm a bit mythered-like;' he meant, confused and mentally harassed. 'An' it feels cold out o' doors. Mayhap I've growed a bit nash wi' sittin' so much at the fireside. But I'm willin' to goo annywheer, Dinah, my gell, to be away from the Saracen. I niver thought to part wi' *him* till I come downstairs toes foremost. But nobody knows what'll happen. Nobody knows what'll happen.'

The old fellow was quite broken, and sat dull-eyed with his hands on his thin knees. He looked about him on the journey, with childlike

curiosity, and made no observation but one. This was drawn from him when, after a distance of thirty miles had been travelled by rail, he saw the familiar skeleton frame above a coal-mine.

'It's been fields for ever so long,' said Daniel, 'and now we'm a-gettin' among the coal again.'

But before he was settled in his new home he had to spend a day or two at the local hotel, a little countryfied house with a bowling-green behind it. He sat there in the snuggery most of his time beside the fire, and once or twice gave orders to which nobody attended, evidently imagining himself back at the Saracen.

'They'n gone an' changed the shelves an' the bottles, Dinah,' he complained; 'an' instaed o' the clock bein' wheer it used to be, they'n stuck it up at my back. It nigh on breaks a man's neck to look an' see what time it is.'

'Never mind, dear,' said Dinah, reading these signs; 'we'll have everything right by

an' by. An' then you'll be comfortable again, won't you?'

'You bide wi' me, my gell,' answered Daniel, 'an' you'll be all right. Eh?'

'Oh, yes,' said Dinah soothingly, thinking that the old man wandered. But he had something on his mind, though it was perhaps the last thing in the world that Dinah was likely to think of. The thing was on his mind, and yet was somehow not to be got at until on the second day, after sitting dull-eyed and silent for two or three hours, he suddenly arose and called loudly for Jane and Mary. Jane and Mary, late maids at the Saracen, were miles away, but one of the young women of the house answered his call. He peered at her with a glance of no recognition at first, but in a while he grasped his own purpose, and hooking her towards him with a forefinger, he asked:

'Theer's a lawyer i' the town, ain't theer?'

'Yes, sir,' said the girl; 'several.'

'Very well,' said Daniel; 'you send for one of 'em, d'ye hear. An' theer's a shillin' for you. Send a lad as can run sharp, and let

him fatch the best lawyer i' the plaäs.' The girl took the shilling, but stood looking at him as if uncertain to obey. 'Don't you be afeard o' me,' Daniel went on, seating himself by the fire once more. 'I want a lawyer. I ain't all I used to be, but I feel well an' bright to-day, an' I've got a lot o' business to do. Fatch a lawyer, an' let me do it while theer's time.'

'Very well, sir,' said the girl; and going out, she despatched the messenger, a stable-boy, who, being impressed with a sense that the business was urgent, ran as if for a midwife, and alarmed a respectable elderly solicitor so much that he ran after the boy all the way back to the inn, to the great wonderment of the inhabitants, who had never seen him run for forty years past.

The landlord was in the snuggery, mounting guard as it were over Daniel, when the solicitor arrived.

'Be you a lawyer?' asked Daniel.

'Yes, sir, I am,' returned the newcomer somewhat out of breath with his exertions.

'You can draw up a will all right? Eh?'

'Certainly.'

'So as theer can't be no manner o' doubt about it?'

'Certainly,' said the solicitor—though, being a man of some experience, he saw the boldness of the assertion.

'Then I, Dan'l Banks, late o' the parish o' Bramwich, do give an' bequeath everythin' of which I die possessed to my daughter Dinah.'

'You wish me to draw up a will to that effect?'

'Course I do,' returned Daniel petulantly. 'What else did I send for you for?'

'Do you wish me to specify the properties?' asked the solicitor.

'Does it matter?' asked Daniel. 'Can't I will 'em in a lump?'

'If you wish to do so, certainly.'

'Very well, then,' answered Daniel, 'put 'em in a lump. All to my daughter Dinah. An' look sharp about it, mister, for I'm a-gettin' on i' years, an' I do't feel much like wearin', I can tell you.'

The solicitor asked the necessary questions,

took the necessary notes, and went his way. Next morning he brought the will, and read it over to the old man, who signed it. The landlord and the solicitor's clerk also signed it, Daniel paid the bill, and the thing was over.

'Now, you wouldn't ha' thought,' said Daniel, addressing the landlord, 'as an ode mon like me, as has got maybe on'y a day or two to last, ud be sich a Gawby as to wait till now afore mekin' his will, would you?'

'Well,' said the landlord, who was of a curious turn, 'that depends on what you've got to leave, you know.'

'So it does, mate,' said Daniel, who saw his drift, and was equal to him. 'So it does.' But he could not resist the desire to say that Dinah would be pretty warm when he was gone —pretty warm. Warmer than most, he added, warming with the theme. And indeed Daniel had a good deal of property down in the old country in one form or another, and a balance at the bank, since the sale of the Saracen, the figures of which might have startled some people.

Of course the folk of a small country town like Wrethedale had their nine-days' wonder about the immigrants and strangers who had settled in their midst. Beyond the fact that they seemed fairly well-to-do plain people, little was learned of them for a time. The new settlers paid their way and went to church, and in a few weeks they were accepted as a fact, and the wonder at them faded out, as it had a right to do. As the weather grew finer and warmer, Dinah used to tempt her father out for a walk now and again, and the change of air and scene and life began to do the old man as much good as anything could hope to do at his time of life. There had been nothing in George's case to carry it beyond the sphere of the local papers, and here in this western town, a hundred miles as the crow flies from the scene of his crime, they felt safe from gossip and from any remembrance or knowledge of the undeserved shame which had fallen upon them.

Wrethedale was so much out of the general way was such an old, settled, sober-sided sort

of place, that it found a simple-minded wonder in things which would never have been noticed in a commonly-active place of its own size. It boasted three solicitors already, two of whom played cricket in the summer and rode to hounds in winter, and did and had no other earthly business. It was therefore certainly a little curious that in the space of some three months after the arrival of the two new households a fourth solicitor, unknown to anybody in the neighbourhood, should suddenly blossom out and burgeon in the High Street with all the glory of new wire blinds, a brass plate, and a lettered bell-pull. It struck Dinah as being curious that the name on the brass plate was John Keen. She had known a John Keen, solicitor and mine-surveyor, at home—her son's friend, and the man she liked best amongst all the acquaintances George had made. Some of them, perhaps most of them, had been a little less than equivocal. Dinah knew nothing of the verses against the Reverend Jabez Wallier, and had a high opinion of one John Keen who was a solicitor. She was just

solemnly wondering whether the John of Wrethedale had anything to do with the John of old days, when she met the John of old days plump in the market-place, and he raised his hat and held out his hand to her.

'Why, Miss Banks,' said John with an indefinable air of guilt upon him, 'this is a surprise indeed!'

'I should never ha' thought of seeing you here,' said simple Dinah. 'Is that your name up in the High Street, Mr. Keen?'

'Yes,' said John, still looking a little guilty, 'that's my name. Are you staying here, Miss Banks, in Wrethedale?'

'Yes,' said Dinah. 'Father an' me are living here.'

'Dear me!' said John, absolutely blushing at this third pretence, and looking guiltier than ever. 'That *is* singular. I have come to settle down here professionally.'

'Indeed!' said Dinah; 'I noticed the name as I came by.' She was casting about in her mind what to say or do. The wound was still open. Who could expect such a grief as she

had suffered to heal in three months' time, or, for the matter of that, in three years John was in the way, and yet she liked him, and was not sorry to see an old face, being a woman of strong local affections. She was naturally valorous, and was disposed to face this situation. 'Will you take me to your office, Mr. Keen?' she said suddenly. 'I want to speak to you.'

'Certainly,' said John; and led the way, wondering what Dinah's topic could be.

'I'm glad to see a face I used to know,' said Dinah, once within the office. 'But you can't fail to know why father an' me came here, Mr. Keen, and——'

'Miss Banks,' said John, 'never say a word upon that question. I have more right to grieve for you than you are likely to be able to guess. But I know nothing of it now. If you will allow me, I will wipe it out of my mind here and now. From this minute forward I have forgotten all about it.'

'Thank you,' said Dinah tremulously. Her errand was already fulfilled, and they talked

with some constraint on either side until she rose to go.

'I hope,' said John with another blush, which in Dinah's motherly eyes was not unbecoming, 'that you will let me come and see you now and then.'

Dinah would be glad to see him, so she said, at any time. She read him now like a book. And she waited for him to ask about Ethel; but John, who was under the impression that he was playing a difficult game with great wariness, and believed himself as inscrutable as the Sphinx, repressed his longings, and did not name her once. This silence forced Dinah's hand. She was only a woman after all.

'I suppose you know that Miss Donne is living here, as well?' she asked.

'I have heard as much,' said John with infinite dryness. 'I hope to be able to pay her my respects as an—old acquaintance in a day or two.' Dinah's mild eyes seemed to him to pierce this transparent humbug through and through, as they did, but he could not yet

wound her by saying one word about his own designs.

'Are business prospects good here, Mr. Keen?' asked Dinah.

'Well, that's rather hard to determine just at first,' said John courageously. 'What practice there is is likely to be of a good sort, I should say. They're county people and that sort of thing, you know, Miss Banks, in this neighbourhood. And one may as well get the best sort of practice as the worst, you know.'

Dinah said, 'Oh yes, of course,' to this, but she regarded John so seriously that he continued as if in self-defence:

'I can afford to wait for a year or two, and I don't know that it matters much if I don't practise at all, except that I don't want to lead an idle life. And whatever there is to be done here will be of the best class, even if there's very little of it. Conveyancing,' said John, guiltily once more, beginning to droop beneath Dinah's gaze, 'is the sort of work I should prefer.'

Dinah said, 'Oh yes, of course,' again, and having wished him well, she shook hands and they parted. It was not, perhaps, altogether a strange thing that she cried when she got home, or that she knelt beside her bed long that afternoon in the quiet of her own chamber, for she saw that what had brought this honest young fellow here was the hope of Ethel, or at worst the determination to try for her; and her own child had once won Ethel, and might have worn her worthily, and have been blessed in her love, and she in his, if he had not been—Ah me! if he had not been a villain.

I say again—I do *not* believe that there is any criminally-minded cur in the whole world who would not forego his crime if he could but see the brood which it is sure to rear.

And oh! young Joe of five-and-twenty years since, young Joe no longer by this time, if anywhere extant, but middle-aged, and verging on the fifties and a little grey, if you could know the grief your folly planted, it would be a heavy thing to bear. A little courage, errant Joe, a little honour, and the tragedy which

obscured so many lives had been averted. Is it of any use to point a moral nowadays? Do others' follies teach us?—or others' wisdom? Or is even—as the poet tells us—our own experience of much sterling worth?

One of two things very soon became evident to John Keen, and he had little heart to choose between them, though heart enough to face them ten times over. But either his move in coming to Wrethedale and setting up there had been made too soon, or it was a false move altogether. Ethel knew why he came—what woman would not?—and she was in no mind to be comforted for the loss of her own wounded self-respect or the loss of her rascally lover. She felt and thought indignantly and with many a throb of that deep wound she carried, that her plighted husband was a felon, and at that hour in prison, and it was cruel to her way of thinking, and dishonouring to her, to suppose that she would ever look at another man again. She had loved, and though she had loved a scoundrel, she had loved him none the less, until she knew him as he was. And

she had no possibilities of affection within her for any new creature of the male species. She hated and despised men at this period of her life with a great and majestic heartiness. Men were vicious and mean and cowardly. What the sacred bard said in his haste, Miss Donne confirmed at leisure. It was illogical, but shall we cry out against a nature so perverted? Are you logical when any dear and trusted friend has newly betrayed you? I am not. I have declaimed against the pretended affection of woman in my time, pretty eloquently as I have fancied. Let the wounded heart speak for a moment as its agonies prompt it. Natures less fine than hers have been soured for life by lesser sorrows, and if I am not mistaken in her, she will grow back slowly to more than her first ripeness of sweet nature, and, probably enough, be happy wife and mother before we see her for the last time, with all these pains buried, though not forgotten.

But what have we to do with prophecy? Let us get back to the story.

'I'm not going to be beaten,' said John

resolutely, when he had failed a dozen times at least in his efforts to meet Ethel. 'I came here in the hope that I should be able to make her a little bit happier, or, at all events, a little bit less miserable, poor little darling.' I can fancy what Ethel's scorn would have been could she have heard that phrase of affectionate commiseration from John's lips. 'I'll do it, somehow. What a chuckleheaded ass I am! Why, the poor girl hasn't even got an organ to play on Sundays. Here!' quoth John, rising pipe in mouth and clawing on his hat and coat, 'I'll see about that at once, anyhow.'

He saw about it to such effect that in less than a week he had matured a plan and found a way to execute it. At Shareham Church, four miles from Wrethedale, there actually was an organ with nobody to play upon it since the rector's daughter had got married. But to ask Ethel to travel four miles twice every Sunday through the year—hail, rain, or shine—would have been preposterous. The organist at St. Stephen the Martyr at Wrethedale was an arrant duffer, and John,

who had an ear for music, was wroth at him every Sunday, though he himself went to church for no loftier object than to look when he could at Miss Donne. So John scraped acquaintance with the rector at Shareham, expressed himself as being deeply interested in church music, got leave to try the organ, of which instrument he knew next to nothing, enthusiastically pronounced upon it, and offered at once to subscribe fifteen pounds per annum towards the expenses of a salaried organist. The rector jumped at the offer, and John almost swore him to secresy, using such vehemence in his request that the rector thought him a sort of bashful saint. Then the young pretender incited the rector to offer the berth to the arrant duffer who tortured the churchgoers at St. Stephen's, and the rector did it, setting another five to John's fifteen and making the pay twenty pounds a year. The arrant duffer also jumped, and went about inflated, thinking himself a pearl amongst organists. Next, the secret schemer told the vicar of St. Stephen's that he had a very angel

of an organist in his congregation, and told Dinah also that the post of organist was vacant, and indeed there was no one left to play at all. So Ethel got one of the smaller longings of her soul, and the congregation within the Martyr's walls were no longer martyred as of old.

At first, when John went to church after completing this arrangement, he felt that he had cheated himself. Ethel was no longer in her old place to be furtively stared at. But he got the better of this grief in a while, and many a time the sound of the pealing organ poured peace into his heart and sacred joy; and to Ethel—while she played it—there was no longer any sorrow in the world, and she would leave the church radiant, and her sabbaths at least were filled with a tranquillity she had never hoped to taste again.

It came to her ears after a while that all this was John Keen's doing. Her pride prompted her to surrender her joy rather than owe it to him, but she had not the heart for this extreme measure. She contented herself with snubbing John, and he bore it with wonderful meekness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Saracen having fallen into new hands, assumed a new aspect and a new title. The real old Saracen, who for many a summer day had looked on the sunshiny street with bilious eyes, and on many a winter night had shrieked and creaked complainingly against the stormy weather, was taken down and relegated to a lumber room, and ultimately chopped up for firewood. For weeks the front of the house was obscured by scaffolding, and quite a little army of men were at work about it. Finally it came out with plate-glass windows and stuccoed front, with a great gilded sign which expressed it as the Saracen and Railway Hotel. Within, things were changed as much as without, and Meshach and Aminadab and

the rest found it on its re-opening night no fit home for them and their memories, and so carried themselves elsewhere with a general feeling of being uprooted.

Prosperous George Bushell, pausing before the house one sunny morning, felt his heart lifted at the sight. The Saracen and Railway Hotel by Andrew Royce was nothing to him, except as a token of the removal of the Saracen by Daniel Banks, and the consequent removal of Daniel and his daughter. They had gone away, having made no sign, and he was once more safe in the possession of his fortune. The heiress had left him in undisputed possession of the field; and although he could not understand its why and wherefore, he appreciated the fact. He could scarcely resist the smile that strove to curve his features as he looked at the transformed structure.

'Hullo! Bushell!' cried a voice, and he turned to face a middle-aged man sitting in a neat dog-cart, between the shafts of which stood a slashing-looking bay mare .The middle-aged man was loud of voice, florid of complexion,

and cheery of aspect, and he wore an enormous beard of chestnut colour, laced, but only laced, with grey.

'Good mornin', Sir Sydney,' said old George as he turned. 'Fine growin' mornin' for the crops, isn't it?'

George had no interest in farming, but Sir Sydney Cheston had, having but recently taken Quarrymoor Farm upon his hands, as Mr. Bushell knew.

'Splendid weather,' said the Baronet. 'Going up to the court? Shall I give you a lift?'

'Why, thank you, Sir Sydney,' said George in his provincial slow drawl; 'I don't mind if I do ride. It's a goodish pace up theer.'

'So it is,' assented Sir Sydney; and the old fellow, moving as heavily and deliberately as he spoke, climbed into the dog-cart, and took his seat by the Baronet's side.

'Nobody iver expected to see me a-ridin' alongside of a baronet,' he said to himself, as the owner of the mare touched her lightly with his whip and set her going.

'Changes behind us, there,' said Cheston, nodding his head backwards.

'All things change i' this world,' said George. 'We've no abidin' city here.' His wooden gravity was quite enough to beguile a listener into the belief that he had at least some thought of what he was talking about.

'No, indeed!' shouted Cheston in his good-humoured noisy voice. 'The first time I ever saw the place was on the very day when your nephew Joe—my old chum you know, Bushell—knocked poor old Screed down and ran away from home. Gad! he must have been out of temper that day, for he knocked me down too. I never told anybody of it before, but it's a fact, by George!'

'Ah, poor Joe-ziph,' said George, dividing the word again into two equally balanced syllables, and putting his company manner on generally. 'It was a blow to his parents which they didn't overget.'

'It wasn't a bad thing for you, Bushell,' said the Baronet, laughing. But the laugh fell into a sigh, half perhaps for his old chum Joe,

but certainly at least half for his own lost youth. 'He was going out to the gold-diggings, I remember. I was the last man to shake hands with him in England, and I was quite hard hit because I couldn't go with him.'

'Was you, now?' asked George.

'Gad, I was,' returned Cheston.

'Here's the High Street,' thought old George; 'they can see as I'm a-ridin' along with a baronet;' and he looked sulky, which was his way of trying to look dignified.

'More changes!' cried Cheston, pointing with his whip. 'That was a private house, and they're turning it into a shop. The place is thriving.'

'Ah,' said George, who, in spite of his business habits, had a true countryman's interest in trifles. 'Young Keen the lawyer lived theer. Wheer's he moved to, I wonder?'

'Young Keen!' said the baronet; 'why, you don't half know the news, Bushell. He left weeks ago. He's gone to live in the same place with that poor little Miss Donne, and old Banks and his daughter. It's quite a migra-

tion. I think he was a bit sweet on the young lady. So was I: but I'm too old to think about that sort of thing nowadays. You and I have kept out of the trap pretty well, haven't we, Bushell?'

'I don't know as that's any comfort, when life's a-beginnin' to close in, Sir Sydney,' said George. 'And so,' he thought, 'young lawyer Keen has followed old Banks and his gell, has he?' He turned it over slowly in his mind, and Cheston, for a wonder, was quiet for a minute. 'Are they at all familiar like?' he asked; 'the Bankses an' young lawyer Keen?'

'Why, you know nothing of what's going on in the town, Bushell,' said Cheston. 'That young scoundrel I committed to Stafford for you was young Keen's closest friend, and the youngster used to go and smoke with Banks twice or thrice a week, at one time. I believe, if Banks's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her. Nice woman she was, eh? I always used to pull up at the Saracen when I drove by, and get a glass of beer from pretty Dinah. Ah, Bushell, she *was* a pretty

girl five-and-twenty years ago when she and your poor nephew Joe were sweethearts.'

'Sweethearts, was they?' asked George. Internally he anathematised his nephew Joe, for he could scarcely help a little soreness at this reiterated mention of him. Did not five-and-twenty years give time enough to get a man buried and out of sight and done with?

'Sweethearts! I should think they were. It was about her he knocked me down, and it was about her that he floored poor old Screed. Screed wasn't a bad sort.'

'A godly person, Mr. Screed was,' said George. 'A very godly person.'

'Here we are!' said the Baronet, pulling up before the police station and leaping down. 'Take the trap to the Dudley, officer. Tell 'em to give the mare a good feed. Stop and see it done, will you. By-the-by, Bushell, remind me, when this licensing work's over, that I have something to say to you about business. That's why I pulled up for you; but I've such a head, I forgot all about it.'

George walked into the court with the

Baronet still talking genially and loudly at his side, and partook of the great man's glory. For Sir Sydney Cheston was the greatest swell those parts could boast, and the old man, like the rest of us, loved to sit in the high places and be seen in good company. But all the while, as he sat on the bench, he gave his vote only as the better-conditioned of his neighbours gave theirs, and thought about the news he had heard. Young Keen—a lawyer—familiar with Dinah, had gone to live in the same parish to which she had retired. What was that for? Was there anything in it?—anything that threatened himself?

Young Keen had begun to defend the prisoner, and had then suddenly resigned the case.

Was it law that young George had committed forgery anyhow, and must in any case suffer for it, and had Keen advised the mother to be quiet until his term of imprisonment was over? Mr. George Bushell was a wooden man and a man of considerable attainments in the way of ignorance. He was a Justice of the Peace, but there was nothing in that to pre-

vent the very commonest point in the law from being a mystery to him. He was the fraudulent owner of a great fortune, and that of itself was enough to make him suspicious. Of course, he had no fear of any punishment beyond the loss of the fortune; but would not that be punishment enough? It is not punishable to commit an offence against the law when the offence is utterly beyond detection, and the certificate he had destroyed had been lost for twenty-five years before he found and destroyed it.

Why had young Keen followed Dinah Banks? 'I believe,' Sir Sydney had said, 'that if Banks's girl had been a year or two younger, he'd have gone for her.' That meant lawyer Keen. George saw no reason why a man of six-and-twenty should not marry a woman of three-and-forty if he set his mind that way; and if lawyer Keen knew of Dinah's claim, it might be worth his while to overlook the difference of a year or two and make a match of it.

Always putting two and two together in this

clumsy and wandering way, but never by any chance making four of them, Mr. Bushell contrived to make himself signally uncomfortable. That there was something in young Keen's following of Dinah—something beyond mere chance—seemed certain. Then he remembered Cheston had said that Keen had been sweet on Miss Donne. She was there also. Now, if Keen courted Miss Donne—lovers tell each other everything—Dinah and Miss Donne were living alone in a townful of strangers—women tell each other everything—if the lawyer got hold of Dinah's story, he would know how futile her fears had been, and would set her on the track at once. Altogether, the mere fact of John Keen having followed the two women was full of peril for George's fortune; and somehow, in these late days, there had been a sort of revival of the memory of errant Joe which of itself left an uneasy sense of dread and expectancy on the old man's mind.

He got at everything by slow and roundabout mental processes; and at last he reached what seemed to him to be the real knot to be

untied in this case. What was he to do—in brief—to keep young George out of the way when his time had expired and he was released from prison? It was pretty evident that, if the mother moved at all, it would be for her son's sake, and not for her own.

'There's some shaäm in it, I'm certain an' sure,' he said to himself. 'The child must ha' been born i' wedlock, but I reckon he came afore his time. It's that as made her keep her tongue betwixt her teeth all this time, an' now if her does anythin' at all, it'll be for the lad's sake.'

There were elements in the case which puzzled him, for he could neither comprehend how plain simplicity could sit down to suffer, nor how an honourable spirit could be so wounded as to resolve on keeping silence against itself rather than identify itself with dishonour. But when once the central idea had taken root in George's mind, it rose to such proportions as to overshadow everything else that grew there. He was as certain as he well could be that Dinah was not likely to

move in her own behalf, and that if she moved at all, it would be to endow that scoundrel of a private secretary with a fortune to which he had no claim except from the accident of birth. If lawyer Keen got to know the story—and that seemed only too probable—he would wait for young George and give him the news in spite of Dinah's want of initiative. Then, how to get at the released criminal before anybody else could get at him?

And across the stupid schemer's brain there flashed a sudden jubilant ray.

The copy of the certificate was gone. It might not be a matter of any great difficulty to get rid of the original, and then to defy all possible attempts against his property. A happy thought, surely, and yet leading to all manner of unpleasant complications. Leading to dangers also. The ray seemed less jubilant.

The church at which Dinah and young Joe had so long since been wed was famous in local annals as the resort of runaway couples who wished to be married. It was but a mile or two from George's house, and he had known it

from babyhood. The parson who had officiated at Dinah's wedding was dead, and the parish clerk had gone the same way. The marriage had been performed at Whitsuntide, at which festive season in old days some fifty or sixty unions were wont to be celebrated at Waston Church, oftener than not with much disreputable riot. Nobody would be likely to remember any one marriage particularly at this time of day, and the church certificate, as the old schemer thought, was its last and only record. Old George was not much of a novel-reader, but he *had* read somewhere of a guilty lord who had illegitimised his brother's children and seized their estate simply by tearing out the record of their father's marriage from the parish register kept in an old church. He saw how simple the process was, but he saw its dangers also. He was a slow and clumsy thinker, but he had that faculty of making dramatic pictures in his own mind of which I have already spoken, and he could never contemplate himself in the act of tearing out the register of his nephew's marriage without seeing a terrible vague hand

approach his shoulder. This terrible vague hand affected him physically, and he used to get up and rub the part it threatened, walking about the while with a wry face, and hitching his shoulder to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling.

But needs must when the devil drives, and George felt himself demon-driver. Under certain conditions, life is not worth having; and the old man found the night and the day alike a burden to him. He reproached himself for cowardice over and over again, and at last, as often happens, he went with no inward increase of courage to the task. The guilty lord, he remembered, had made a burglarious entrance to the church, in 'The Secret of Glen Snassen,' in the dead of night, while a tempestuous wind shook at the casements and howled in the vaults. He had scarcely pluck enough for such an enterprise, and indeed burglary seemed unnecessary. A public omnibus passed the church every half-hour in the summer-time, and one fine hot summer day he was set down at an hotel a hundred yards from the porch.

He drank a glass of whisky to steady his nerves, and then walked into the street and strolled by the churchyard. The sexton was bobbing up and down in a half-made grave, and George, leaning his arms upon the mossy stones of the wall, accosted him.

'Are you sexton here?'

The man answered in the affirmative.

'Been here long? Eh?'

'Seven 'ear come Christmas,' said the sexton.

Old George's head began to swim, and his heart grew muffled on a sudden. A minute passed before he spoke again, and the sexton by that time was bobbing up and down in his grave once more.

'I wanted to find out,' said the melodramatist, when his voice and wits returned to him, 'about a wedding as took place here five-and twenty 'ear ago. There's a bit o' property dependin' on it.'

'Yes, sir,' said the sexton, scenting fees and pausing at his task. 'I can get the keys, sir, if you'd like to look at the register.'

'Very well,' said George pompously; 'I'll jine you i' the church in five minutes.'

'Very well, sir,' said the sexton; and having driven his spade into the clay, he took up his cap and jacket, and swung leisurely off to the vicarage. The melodramatic schemer also sauntered away, his inexpressive countenance showing nothing of his inward pains, though his head was swimming again, and the curious muffled feeling at the heart had returned. The road led half-way round the churchyard, as he knew, and then a by-way ran at the back, so that the burial-place was islanded, so to speak. He walked leisurely until he reached the main road again, and then, seeing the sexton in the act of unlocking the church-door, he quickened his pace a little, and felt such a tremor of dread at the porch that he dodged suddenly into the sacred building as though a bull had been behind him. The sexton, who was already half-way up the aisle, failed to notice this curious entry, but George felt the necessity of steadying himself, and made a resolute effort. The vague terrible hand, backed by a presence yet more

vague and terrible, was behind him. What if young Keen should come to look for the register at that very hour and moment? Ugh! what a disagreeable fancy!

'What date?' asked the sexton.

'About '49 or '50,' said old George huskily. He had known that the task would be a hard one, but he found it harder than he feared. Yet, his wooden face showed nothing.

'What name, sir?'

'John Smith an' Mary Ann Thomas,' said the guilty one, speaking more huskily than before. 'Here, I'll look for it.'

He put on his gold-rimmed glasses, and drawing a book towards him, turned over the leaves one by one. They had a faint odour suggestive of long imprisonment from light and air which reminded him of the discovery of his nephew's coat. The sexton sat down at the other side of the vestry-table, with his arms upon it, and watched the search drowsily. The day was hot, and the sexton nodded once or twice, and, just as the old schemer had begun to hope that he might fall asleep, caught him-

self up with a great snatch, and became prematurely wide-awake.

'Dry work, eh, my man?' said George with husky pomposity.

'Yes, indeed, sir,' said the sexton.

The entries for 1849 were in one volume, and those for the year following in another. George had taken up the wrong volume, but he plodded through it to the end, and with a curious new tremor closed it and took up the other.

'A slow job, eh?' he said with a great effort.

'Yes, indeed, sir,' said the sexton, 'an' a dry 'un too, sir, as you say.'

'Yes,' said George, 'it's all that. Could you get me a glass o' water? An' maybe, after all that diggin', you wouldn't mind a glass o' beer yourself—eh?'

'Thankee,' said the sexton, and old George, still turning over the leaves, drew a shilling from his pocket, and, without looking at the man, pushed it across the table. Now, the sexton was a fairly honest, dutiful sort of fellow,

and if the books had been old enough to have included an entry made before the great Registration Act came into being, he would probably have found strength equal to his day, and would have resisted his temptation. But he knew well enough that every entry these dusty old volumes held was snug and safe in Somerset House, there to be seen on payment of a shilling; and he felt, therefore, that there was no particular need to keep watch and ward over any respectable old party who wished to hunt out a certificate. And grave-digging on a hot summer's day is a thirsty occupation, and the sexton was dry. So he accepted the shilling with thanks, and having poured out a glass of rather stale water from the vicar's carafe, he put on his hat, and left ancient and uninstructed melodrama to its work.

Old George, with a dreadful feverish haste, raced through the leaves until he reached the date he sought for. There was quite a glut of marriages that day, and he turned over a score of leaves before he reached the document for which he was running so much risk, and which

was, if he had only known it, so absolutely useless. He had come prepared, and slipping from his pocket a thin metal rule, and a specially sharpened pen-knife, he set the rule under the page, thrust it well up against the back of the volume, and at a single stroke of the keen blade severed the leaf. He folded it neatly, though he shook aguishly all the while, and put it in his pocket. Then he feigned to go on reading the certificates, that he might look natural when the sexton should return.

By-and-by he came, rubbing a hand across his lips.

'I can't find it,' said George, throwing himself back a little, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

'Is there any evidence as the parties was married here, sir?' asked the sexton, feeling himself bound to show a little interest in consideration of the tip.

'It was allays took to be so,' said George.

'An' it's quite sure as they was married in '49 or '50?'

'If they was married at all,' said George.

He was in a dreadful tremor inside, but he felt bound to keep the pretence going and to depart naturally.

'Is there much dependin' on it, sir?' asked the sexton, beginning to lock up the books.

'Two or three thousand,' said George, growing easier as the despoiled volume went out of sight.

'You'll ha' to try Somerset House, sir,' the man said, turning the key in the lock.

'What for?' asked George.

'Stifficate o' marriage,' said the sexton. 'All on 'em goes up to Somerset House, from every parish church in the land, sir.'

George's head began to swim again, and once more his heart felt muffled and stifled in its beat.

'Is all them,' he said stiffly and slowly, 'at Somerset House?—all them as I've been lookin' at?'

'Yes, sir,' said the sexton, 'every one of 'em.'

'An' can anybody see 'em?'

'Oh yes, sir, anybody. You'll ha' to pay a shillin', sir, that's all. Same as here, sir.'

George, with shaky fingers, drew forth the fee.

'I suppose,' he said with trebled desperation, 'as you take great care of 'em here, though, for all that?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the sexton, who was leading the way down the aisle by this time, swinging the keys in his hand. 'The law's very strict, sir. I b'lieve it's transportation for life if anybody destroys a leaf.'

George gave a husky little groan.

CHAPTER XVI.

HISTORY repeats itself. Here was old George travelling in young George's footsteps, and going clumsily about to commit a useless crime.

It is only on a stage that a scoundrel, finding himself frustrated, can writhe and howl and shudder without attracting the attention of the bystanders. Whatever emotions he experienced, old George dared show nothing, and he marched deaf and blind into the sunshine, and walked straight on without knowing or caring whither his footsteps led him. By-and-by he began to clear a little, and then he went into a meadow and cursed his day—not eloquently, but with thoroughness. He had always been a moral man on his own peculiar lines, but he had naturally listened, more or less unwillingly, to a good deal of bad language in his time, and now he felt his knowledge

useful, and employed it to the full. If any stranger could have come suddenly upon this respectable, solid-looking old man, in spotless black broadcloth, hat of broadish brim, snow-white linen, and respectable grey whiskers, and could have heard his language, it might have startled him. But before old George had gone thrice through his stock of phrases—he was literally without invention—his head began to whirl, and his eyes saw nothing but a silvery mist with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire. More than anything else could have done his fear sobered him. He had been taking God's name in vain, horribly, and now perhaps he was going to die. More than once he had heard of sudden judgments.

He crept back into the road again and walked towards the town, a little bent and blanched. He was getting on in years, and these violent emotional exercises break an old man a good deal. A sturdy walker who had kept himself well in exercise all his life long, he was yet right glad of the passing omnibus, for somehow his legs seemed to-day to fail

him, and his feet were heavy on the dusty road. The second certificate was burned that night as the first had been, though he felt no sense of triumph as he burned it, but only one of aching terror and remorseful rage.

Sitting by his lonely fireside—for even in summer a fire is a necessity in the coal countries—he drank pretty freely, and at last, with his pipe in his hands and his feet on the fender, he fell asleep. And as he slept he dreamed a curious dream. He had gone forward in time, and it was the day when George Banks's term of imprisonment should expire. The dreamer was somehow invisible in a grey dream-mist, but in the same grey mist he saw a massive door, which he knew for the entrance to a prison, and about it were Ethel Donne, and Dinah, and young lawyer Keen. He knew, as people do in dreams, what brought them all there. They were waiting for the outcoming of the prisoner, and the prisoner was to come and claim his own. Old George, powerless and tongue-tied, waited in an agony for the door to open. After a long time it began to

move, slowly, slowly, slowly, and when at last it stood wide, he knew, with an incredible revulsion of ease and joy, that the prisoner was lost, and that nobody in the prison had an idea of his whereabouts.

The revulsion awoke the dreamer, and he sat up dazed and miserable. He mixed a fifth or sixth stiff tumbler and drank it, for, like other men oppressed by care, he was beginning to fly to that false and foolish solace. In time he drowsed again, and the dream came back precisely as before, and again the revulsion of feeling awoke him. This time a dim little light of hope seemed to accompany his waking, and he struggled to get back to sleep to dream it over again. Everybody knows that if you dream a thing three times it is sure to come true. But though the dream haunted him whilst he waked, it fled him when he slept. The fire burned out, and he awoke chill and desolate to find the chimney-piece clock marking the unheard-of hour of half-past one. He went to bed oppressed by fears and remorses, and, tossing an aching head in the dark, tried

to force sleep and the dream back again. But all at once, as he tossed and tumbled, a very sunbeam of intelligence seemed suddenly to warm and light his mind, and he sat up and clasped his hands together. Then he sank back with a sigh of comfort.

He would make the dream prophetic! He would *have* it true!

Ay! and he saw his way to it. There was no hope of sleep for him that night, but as he lay and turned over his plan in his stiff-jointed mind, the clouded horizon seemed to lift more and more, peace came back to him—or promised a return, at least—and his hold upon his fortune grew sure again.

He was up with the first gleam of dawn, arranged his business, wrote a number of letters, packed a portmanteau, and started by the earliest train for London.

Everybody has heard of Messrs. Crœsus Brothers. They are leviathan financiers, helping to make wars, helping, when it pays them, to keep peace—and as powerful in either

direction as Schouvaloff or Bismarck. They make loans to empires, and count their profits by tens of thousands.

The junior partner, Sir Jonas Crœsus, who had been a Cabinet minister, and was likely to take office again when the political wheel should turn, was a grey and worn-looking man, with a face of singular kindness and honesty. He was a Jew by descent, and by habit a Christian. He was probably meant by nature for a philanthropist, but he was a financier on a large scale to begin with, and latterly he had spent a dozen years or so in Parliament, in hot fight for office most of the time, and he had grown somewhat hardened. But though a Jew and a financier and a post-Cabinet minister, and as hard as nails in politics and business, he was a good-hearted creature, and was even something of a sentimentalist at bottom.

Crœsus Brothers were old George's London agents, and he was known to them as a sound and reputable business man, whose affairs stood on a big basis. He had never come into personal contact with either of the partners, but

he was known to them in advance, and he sent in his name with some certainty of being attended to.

'Sir Jonas will see you, sir,' said an elderly clerk, when Mr. Bushell had waited for a minute or two. George followed the clerk into a comfortable room where sat Sir Jonas at a knee-table with docketed papers on it, and an ivory mouth-pieced tube which ran into the floor. The country man of business was a little surprised, was even a little dashed, to see such trifling signs of work about. He had vaguely expected a tangled growth of tubes, a half-dozen telegraphic machines, and a disorderly well of papers—Bank of England notes and acceptances from Rothschild.

'Day, sir,' said Sir Jonas, nodding him to a seat.

George needed more than this to help him out. He was here on an impudent enterprise, intending no less than to hoodwink this great financier, and make a cat's-paw of him; and when he saw the lofty grey head and the sagacious eyes of the man, he repented of his coming.

Sir Jonas made pencil marks on various papers and looked at home. George cleared his throat, and the great man glanced at him.

'My arrand, Sir Jonas,' said the wooden George in his woodenest manner, 'is not what you may call strictly on business. I want a introduction to the Seckitary o' State for the Home Department.'

'Oh!' said Sir Jonas. 'Will you meet me at five this afternoon, at my house? In business hours I attend to business only. Day, Mr. Bushell. At five.'

Sir Jonas went on making pencil notes on papers, and old George retired. He felt abashed and defeated, though he told himself that it was ridiculous to suppose that such a man as Sir Jonas could devote his business hours to the discussion and furtherance of other people's private affairs. But he half-fancied his scheme pierced through already by the sagacious eyes of the great financier, and he went hot and cold, whilst beneath his black kid gloves his palms perspired. He shook himself out of these foolish fears, but they came back again, and he

had no appetite for the solid old-English dinner to which he sat down at a Strand restaurant at two o'clock in the afternoon. In the course of many years of prosperity he had learned to appreciate claret, and he took a bottle of the best the place afforded, and felt a shade more comfortable. Then he smoked a long clay gravely and sipped coffee and read the papers until half-past four, and, having paid his reckoning, walked off solidly in the direction of Grosvenor Square, looking the picture of country commercial soundness and rectitude. He timed himself so as to reach Sir Jonas's house at five o'clock to the minute, and, being admitted, was ushered into a shady library which had a scent of cigar smoke about it perceptible even to a smoker. Enter Sir Jonas with a cigar between his lips, his waistcoat a little open, and his feet in beaded slippers.

'An introduction to the Home Secretary?' he said, as if renewing a conversation broken off half a minute before. 'May I know your object?'

'Why, yes,' said George with a slow wooden-

ness which looked like hesitance. 'You may, Sir Jonas. I want to make an appeal to the clemency o' the Crown.'

'In whose behalf?'

'In the behalf of a young man named George Banks as was my private seckitary, Sir Jonas.'

'Yes? What are the circumstances?'

'He forged my name for three hunderd pounds,' said old George, with a cold desperation which made itself heard in his voice and seen in his face. 'He was tried an' found guilty, an' he was sentenced to two 'ears' imprisonment.'

'How long since?'

'Six months ago.'

The wicked old schemer's voice quivered, and the great financier asked himself, 'A sentimentalist behind that mask of wood?' for being a sentimentalist himself, and a stern man of business into the bargain, he despised sentiment—until it touched him.

'Have you any doubt about his guilt?' he asked.

'Not the least i' the world,' responded

George. 'No—he was guilty.' He saw how absurd it would be to attempt to forward his case by any doubt of young George's guilt. But his voice sounded miserable and reluctant when he admitted it.

'Are there extenuating circumstances?' asked Sir Jonas. 'You must have something to go on.'

'Perhaps,' said George, 'you'll be so good, Sir Jonas, as gi'e me a minute to tell all about it.'

'Certainly,' replied the great man. 'Be seated.'

Whilst old George slowly seated himself, Sir Jonas touched the spring blind and let a sudden flood of summer light into the room. This disconcerted the visitor mightily, and his face was troubled.

'The fellow's in earnest,' thought Sir Jonas, and, seating himself, nodded at his visitor to signify attention. The sagacious eyes looked straight at George and discomfited him so that he was fain to hang his head, and a generally furtive aspect laid hold upon him, and his voice

shook a little. All this told in his favour, for he seemed to the listener to be moved in behalf of the man whose cause he seemed to plead.

'He was a smart young feller,' he said shakily and huskily, 'an' he belonged to decent folks as was pretty well-to-do. He was a clerk i' my office, and I took a fancy to him an' promoted him to be my private seckitary. Then he got i' trouble with a money-lendin' feller of the name o' Curtice, and was very hard drove by him. At the time I prosecuted I didn't know as he expected to be able to replace the money in a week or two, but I've found out sence as he had a good prospect o' doin' so.'

This was a lie and a mere coincidence. Old George knew nothing of Erebus.

'He was tempted very hard, an' he expected to be able to pay back,' he went on, his furtive, shamefaced, hangdog look, and his husky voice making him almost eloquent to the financier's good heart. 'Of course, I'm not a-sayin' as that's an excuse, Sir Jonas; but look at what he lost. His father was well-to-do, an' now he'll cut him off. He was goin' to be

married to a nice young gell as owned a freehold farm an' other property. An' all that aside, Sir Jonas, two 'ears must be allowed to be a very hot sentence for a first offence.'

'Who was the judge who tried the case?' asked Sir Jonas.

'Mr. Justice Wormould,' said old George.

'Wormould *is* severe,' said Sir Jonas—'undoubtedly severe. I have had my attention attracted to one or two cases in which, as it appeared to me, he leaned rather to the side of strict justice than of a mercy which might be wiser. But in this case, Mr. Bushell——' He paused and fidgeted. He wanted to shake old George by the hand, but he would not so have betrayed himself for the world.

'I wouldn't be so cruel,' said George, with renewed tremor as he approached the nucleus of his plot, 'as t' ask the Seckitary to throw the poor lad loose o' the world without a prospect. What I say is, Let him have a chance. Now, I've got correspondents in Australia, Sir Jonas, an' my object is to give him a passage out, an' a letter of recommendation, tellin' the wull story

plain an' straight'—he saw that that touch was needful—'an' perhaps a hunderd pounds to begin again with.'

The great financier sprang from his chair and shook the country man of business by the hand.

'Mr. Bushell,' he said with warmth, 'rely upon my influence.'

Mr. Bushell's face went crimson and then went grey.

'I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, Sir Jonas,' he said, more hoarsely than ever, and Sir Jonas gave a renewal of the grip before he dropped his hand. But old George had not yet reached the actual hub of the wheel of design, and detection was possible even now. It was a bold plan. He went on anxiously. 'Theer's still one thing, Sir Jonas, if you'll forgive my mention on it. I'm in a pretty big way o' business, an' I've got five-and-thirty clerks i' my empl'y, and three or four hunderd men. Now, if it got to be known as I'd took a step to free this young man, the consequences might be dangerous. As it is, he's took for a example, an' I mek no doubt he's talked about for such.

Now, much as I wish it, I can't move i' this matter if it is to get into the papers an' be known fur an' wide.'

'Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame!' said Sir Jonas to himself. 'This man is a Christian! A gentleman at heart! A jewel of a fellow!' The jewel of a fellow waited with bitter anxiety and fear.

'Do you think,' he ventured to say after a pause, 'as that 'ud be possible?'

'I cannot say what view the Home Secretary may take of the matter, Mr. Bushell,' said Sir Jonas, walking up and down with his hands behind him, 'but I can at least promise that your benevolent scheme shall not suffer at my hands. If you will allow me, I will see the Secretary this evening. I shall meet him at the House, and will do my best to secure you an interview.'

'Thank you, Sir Jonas,' said old George.

'George Banks,' said Sir Jonas, bending above the table, pen in hand, and writing as he spoke. 'Private secretary to Mr. George Bushell. Tried for forgery before Mr. Justice Wormould. Where?'

'Stafford,' said George.

'When?' asked Sir Jonas as he wrote.

'First o' Febiwerry last,' George answered.

'Good.' Sir Jonas laid the sheet of note-paper upon a blotting-pad, folded it, and set his hand upon it. 'You will excuse me now, Mr. Bushell. Where shall I write to you?'

'I shall stop i' town,' said George, 'until I've seen the Seckitary for the Home Department.' He named his hotel, and Sir Jonas, again shaking him warmly by the hand, escorted him to the door and saw him off in person.

'That dull old fellow is an honour to human nature,' said Sir Jonas.

'I didn't think,' said the dull old fellow as he walked away, 'as I should ha' got round him anythin' like so easy.'

Sir Jonas saw the Home Secretary that evening in the smoking-room of the House, and laid George Bushell's story before him. The official had that day been greatly tried by a circumstance which made him glad to be lenient. A man somewhere in the North of England had been found guilty of murder and

sentenced to death. Strenuous efforts had been made to obtain a reprieve, and the Home Secretary had gone through a most unpleasant time. He had conscientiously examined the evidence; he made all reasonable inquiry; he would willingly have leaned to mercy's side had it been possible, but he was compelled in conscience to let the sentence take effect. The man had been hanged that morning, and had died protesting his innocence, and the Home Secretary had read his protest in the early editions of the evening papers. He was sure he had done his best to be just—he believed the sentence deserved—but, after all, there was a doubt in his mind—the merest shadow, and yet enough.

The most impartial of judges and best of men are apt to be affected in this way.

'Wormould has a heavy hand,' he said, when he had heard the story through. 'But two years even for a first offence is not an unheard-of sentence.'

'I suppose not,' said Sir Jonas. 'But I wish you could see the man. And life is not so

gracious a business that it is worth while to stifle anybody's generous impulses except on good reason.'

'No,' said the Secretary with a half-laugh. 'Except on good reason. This sort of thing is really not so rare as you seem to fancy. Prosecutors relent when they have gone too far, and think they can stop the judicial machine by laying a finger on the fly-wheel.'

'You figuring as the fly-wheel?' said Sir Jonas.

'Precisely,' the Secretary answered.

'Will you see the man? I shall take it as a personal favour.'

'If you put it in that way,' said the Secretary.

'Yes, I put it in that way,' said Sir Jonas.

'I'm horribly busy.'

'Busier than I am?' asked the great financier.

The Secretary smiled.

'You have the man's address?'

'Of course,' said Sir Jonas. 'He is within a mile of us. Come! the fight downstairs

won't begin for a couple of hours. Shall I send for him now?'

'If you will.'

Sir Jonas addressed a brief note to George Bushell, Esq., and despatched a messenger by cab. Old George, when he came to think about it, had been comforted by his interview with Sir Jonas, and had taken a glass or two of whisky on the strength of it. When the messenger arrived with the note, he began to be afraid that he was scarcely fit to see a Home Secretary, or be seen by one; but, having sluiced his head and face with fair water, he felt better, and, joining the messenger, was driven to the Palace of Westminster.

Now, the Home Secretary—as Sir William Harcourt knows—is an important personage, and for any criminal person, with a possibility of penal servitude for life hanging over him, to approach so great a functionary with intent to make a cat's-paw of him, is an act of amazing boldness, possibly of amazing rashness, possibly of astounding folly. This consideration began to weigh heavily upon

George's mind, and, when the Bude light became visible at the top of the great tower, its very rays seemed to pierce him as with darts of anguish. But he lacked the courage to run away, and, indeed, he stood condemned to go through with the business now. And why should anybody suspect him? Why should anybody look for an evil motive behind such a promise of benevolence? Who was likely to guess his relationship with the criminal? Vague, horrible fears that the Home Secretary might be personally acquainted with all the archives of Somerset House in detail assailed the miserable old schemer, and a hundred other fears, as foolish and as visionary, chilled him to the marrow as he followed the messenger into the strange precincts of the House, where, for anything old George knew to the contrary, there might be torture-chambers.

Sir Jonas, valuing time too highly to endure George's drawl, told the story for him, appealing to him now and then with a 'That is so, Mr. Bushell?'

'That is so,' George answered to each of

these inquiries, and his heart seemed gradually to come back to him. But Sir Jonas did not insist on privacy, and George broke in with hang-dog furtive air, standing hat in hand in a corner of the smoking-room. 'Theer's another thing, Sir Jonas, as you've forgot to mention.'

'What is that?'

'I can't move i' this matter at all, if anybody's to know as I had a hand in it, or if it's to get into the papers as the young man hasn't served his sentence.'

'Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame,' Sir Jonas whispered behind his hand.

'I've got thirty-five clerks i' my empl'y,' George went on, repeating his argument of that afternoon, 'an' some hunderds o' workmen, an' it 'ud be a bad example. I should fear to set it.'

'Well said,' cried Sir Jonas.

The great official said urbanely that the case should have his best attention. The judge who tried the case must be consulted, and the chaplain and governor of the gaol must report on the criminal's conduct and condition. The

step suggested was a grave one, and must not be taken hastily. The proposal reflected the very greatest credit on Mr. Bushell's heart. And, in brief, it was plain even to old George himself that this most insolent and audacious of schemes was in a fair way to success.

He gave his home address, took a respectful leave, and went back to his hotel; elated, yet shuddering. If his motive should be discovered?

Yet, a man will willingly endure a great deal for a quarter of a million of money, and brother Joseph's quarter of a million had taken root in George's soul. He would rather have died than have surrendered it.

Every now and again it occurred to him that it might be that all the trouble he had taken, and the danger he had incurred, were unnecessary; but his fears goaded him, and the thinnest shadow of dreadful chance struck terror to his soul. He returned now to the Black Country, and was tried by the agony of the law's delay for three dreary weeks. At the end of that time he received an official note

informing him that his prayer was granted, and that, except for the necessary publication through the ordinary official channels, which, of course, could not possibly be dispensed with, his desire for secrecy would be respected. The reservation stabbed him like a knife.

'Theer's nothin' for it,' he said, sitting in his armchair and staring stupidly at the fire, 'but to get him out o' the country wi' a rush, an' so ha' done wi' it.'

The official note inclosed an authorisation to visit the prisoner, and intimated besides that the revised term of the prisoner's durance would expire in a month's time within a day or two.

'I'll goo an' see him,' said George, 'this very day.' But, as he rose in blind haste to forward his scheme, that dreadful swimming in the head from which he had twice or thrice suffered came back upon him. He saw nothing but a silvery mist, with splashes in it of alternate ink and fire, and he sank into his seat and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE was a pious warder in the gaol in which young George was confined, and one night, as he locked the prisoner up, he threw in a word in season.

'There's a worse prison than this, young man,' said the pious warder.

'What's that?' said the prisoner. He was a good deal reduced by prison diet, for one thing, and he was not too proud to speak to anybody. And besides, except the chaplain, nobody had ever offered him a civil word. So he answered quite briskly, and in a tone of interest, 'What's that?'

'Hell!' said the pious warder, and closed the door.

George, as this theological bullet struck him, leaped to his feet and cried out to the unhearing walls and the iron door, though he

took care not to speak until the door was closed.

'Insolent cad!' Then, being weakened by prison diet—for as yet he was new to its effects, and had not even begun to experience its tonic influence—he sat down by his little bit of gaslight, and began to cry. The way of transgressors is hard, and he felt the hardship without fully recognising himself as a transgressor. He *was* ill-used. It was such a ridiculous absurdity to suppose that a man in his position, and with his prospects, should have meant to rob anybody of three hundred pounds. A fool as gross as ignorance made drunk could scarcely think it—the idea was so monstrously and palpably absurd. And yet people actually *did* think it, and as a consequence he was here, condemned to two years' imprisonment, a felon, branded for life, lost, friendless, hopeless. And nobody pitied him, nobody thought how horribly unlucky he was; nobody guessed how honourable and high-minded he really was at bottom. If he wept under the burden of these reflections and the shock of the warder's insolence, what wonder?

Since his entry to the gaol he had been admirably subordinate, partly through policy, and perhaps a little because he was prone by nature to avoid resisting strong things. Here authority, though calm, was strong enough to have cowed a much more pugnacious nature. George's valour was essentially discreet, and he made a model prisoner. The Chaplain had heard good reports of him, and, as luck would have it, he paid his first real visit to his new charge whilst George was crying. He had gone formally into his cell once before, and had dropped a text or two, but now he came prepared with all the weapons of Gospel agriculture, to plough and sow and harrow the criminal's soul.

The door opened, and the forger sat with his head in his hands, weeping. The door closed again, and the Chaplain and the prisoner were alone. George knew him by his legs, and had no need to look up to recognise him. The Chaplain's were the only black broadcloth trousers in the prison.

'I am glad,' said the Chaplain, 'to find you softened by your chastisement.'

The prisoner's gorge arose, but he said nothing. Softened? Why should anybody be glad to find him softened, victim of injustice and ill-fortune as he was?

'The time already afforded you for reflection,' pursued the Chaplain, 'has been brief, and that which remains before you is long. I implore you to make good use of it.'

Now, there was a double insult, and George was quick to see and feel both edges of it.

'The object of punishment'—so the Chaplain flowed on—'is twofold. In one aspect it is strictly punitive. In another it tends to reformation. Here you have time to consider your past misdeeds, and to make and strengthen holy resolutions for the future.'

'Canting hound!' said the prisoner to himself. 'What sort of resolutions would he make if he were here?'

But the Chaplain habitually set the weapons of Gospel agriculture to work on stony ground, and would not have been much discouraged even if the prisoner had spoken his thoughts aloud. He went on, business-like, with truths

trite enough, but no less true on that account, to set the enormity of the prisoner's offence before him. Then he told him how unhappy he was, and at this period in his harangue the hearer's tears fell fast. He told the miserable George how he had sacrificed the substance of happiness and prosperity for the mere shadow of a fleeting joy; and when George sobbed in answer, the Chaplain warmed to his text and grew nearly eloquent. And the more eloquent the Chaplain grew, the more the criminal was affected; and the more the prisoner was affected, the more the Chaplain was stirred to effort. He was a thoroughly good man, pious and in earnest, and we all like an appreciative listener. The criminal cried at the exhortation, and the exhorter naturally felt well disposed to him, as you would feel to me if I laughed at your comic story, and shed tears at your strokes of narrative pathos, brother-novelist.

George himself began to think the Chaplain, within limits, an appreciative sort of man; and when, beneath the prisoner's tears and its own eloquence, the exhorting voice began to shake

and to grow a little husky, the criminal murmured that he felt the value of sympathy, and would think of the good advice which had been given him.

The Chaplain in parting shook him by the hand and left a tract behind him. That sort of literature had never had any charms for the criminal until now, but anything is better than nothing, and he read the tract and took an interest in it, and read it so often, for sheer want of something better to do, that he knew it almost by rote when the good man next visited him. And if on future occasions he humbugged the Chaplain, he began by humbugging himself. Every man but the greatest has a little of the chameleon in him, and takes his colour from surroundings. Young curates coming up to town and meeting old college chums in bachelor chambers have been known in the course of a day or two to throw off something of the restraint of habitual piety, to drink bitter beer once again, and to take a bashful hand at sixpenny napoleon. It is within living memory that the late Mr. Peace told the chaplain of the

gaol within which he suffered the final penalty of the law that he—Peace—would show the Chaplain how a Christian could die. Impressionable human nature!—not altogether deceived, nor more than nine-tenths deceiving.

And so, on a sudden, this young man became quite a model of Christian propriety. He forgave John Keen and all his other enemies; he admitted the justice of the sentence which had been passed upon him, and out of the depths of his regeneration he wrote a letter to Dinah, a letter so pious and edifying that the Chaplain consented to let it go, and, by the Governor's permission, posted it with his own hands. In that epistle he set before his supposed sister the manner in which he had become converted from the error of his ways, and besought her also to seek the cleansing fountain in which he had been sanctified. Poor Dinah was spared the misery of reading this effusion. The local postmaster returned it to the gaol, marked in red ink, 'Gone. Left no address.'

No. 32, B Corridor, became a sort of model

prisoner, and was in the main treated with great kindness. The pious warder even went so far as to supplement his rations—against all rule—with bottles of warm tea and wedges of pork pie, the which 32 of B Corridor gratefully received and disposed of. And when at length, beneath the seal of official secrecy, the inquiries prompted by old George Bushell were made by the Home Department, the Governor and the Chaplain were both honestly pleased that a young fellow who showed snch sincere desire for amendment seemed likely to have another chance in the world. Their reports were eminently favourable to the prisoner, who, as a matter of course, knew nothing of the negotiations.

The benevolent employer, awaking from his swoon, found himself chilled to the very marrow, and so weak that he could scarcely rise from his chair. For a while he was not sure that he had not fallen asleep after reading the official letter; but as he grew clearer, he remembered that he had fallen suddenly back with an awful swimming in the head, and his

fears once more got hold of him. Four-and-twenty years ago and more, so his dull conscience now recalled him to the truth, he had begun to plot against his nephew, only with the faintest hope that the plot might be successful. All these years Nemesis had slumbered, and now was upon him. He was going to be punished for his wickedness. These visitations frightened him, for they came in answer to his sins. Well, then, he would make all straight and right again—would make full restitution—when he died. In the meantime, surely, no Deity could be displeased by his benevolence to a young man who had so shamefully betrayed his trust. He would be good to young Banks, and free him from prison, and give him a new chance in the world, and money to start with, two hundred pounds instead of one—an ample provision. And then he would make a new will, and in place of founding the great Bushell Hospital and Institute in its projected entirety, he would bequeath everything his brother Joseph had left behind him to Dinah, its rightful owner. Surely,

thought the old sinner, tremulous now and full of fears, that was enough to do. Surely that put a new complexion on the matter, and made his plot pious. If his own conscience could not see a flaw in the new scheme, might he not believe or hope that the flaw went unseen? There was one thing about which he was absolutely certain. He had never meant to be a wicked man, and if circumstances tempted him too strongly to be resisted now, it was in his power to do justice at the end. Even in the meantime he was acting benevolently to the criminal George. He, at least, was not at present entitled to a penny of the money, and a year and a half of imprisonment lay before him, apart from the self-excusing, self-accusing old rascal's interference.

I am ashamed to have wasted so many words on so simple an analysis. Everybody knows how to cheat his conscience.

Tremulous still, and looking old and haggard, he began his preparations for his journey. He wrote and despatched instructions to the managing clerk at his offices, with respect to

some hitherto unarranged affairs, filled a pocket flask with whisky as a guard against any new attack of faintness, and, walking to the railway station, was borne away. People who met him noticed his haggard pallid looks, and said to one another that old Bushell was ageing fast and beginning to break up. He felt it himself, though he set down much of it to his late continuous anxiety, and looked forward to a rapid recovery when its cause should have disappeared.

The journey was not a lengthy one, and the sunlight was lying hot and white upon the main street of the country town when he reached it. But now a great reluctance to go near the gaol fell upon him, and he walked down the shady side of the road with new tremors and misgivings, all undefined, and probably the worse to bear on that account. He was unknown to the few unoccupied residents who gazed idly after him, but all faces looked suspicious to him in his timorous mood, and everybody seemed to know his errand. The sexton's statement oppressed him, and he felt

what a very awkward thing it was for a man who had a possible sentence of transportation for life hanging over him to put his head inside a gaol. But the thing had to be done, and when the road was quite clear of observers, he advanced to the massive gate—the very gate he had seen in his dream, though he had never beheld it with bodily eyes before—and rang the bell. The echoes went clanging and tingling about the hollow courtyard, and a warder opened a side door and demanded to know his business.

'Tek my card in to the Governor,' said old George, with shaky pomposity. 'I'm the bearer of a letter from the Home Seckitary, and I want to see him.'

'Walk in, sir,' said the warder respectfully, and the visitor obeyed. How the startled echoes clanged and tingled through the hollow court when the warder slammed the solid little door!

The warder, having called a fellow official, gave him Mr. Bushell's card, with instructions to take it to the Governor; and then, inviting

the visitor to be seated, mopped his forehead and said it was a roaster. Old George assented and looked at the ornaments on the wall, all of which were disagreeably suggestive of strong durance. After what seemed a long pause, heavy footsteps set the echoes going in the courtyard again, and the messenger reappeared.

'The Governor's compliments, sir, and will you walk this way.'

Out into the open yard, then through a heavy door—which the warder unlocked—into a corridor, then through another door into a lengthier corridor. All the doors, old George noticed with an uncomfortable creepiness in the region of the spine, closed with a snap behind—and now, if the Secretary of State had pierced his plan from the first, how safe they had him! That was all nonsense, and he knew it, but he shivered at it. He was relieved when, having traversed the whole length of the gaol, they came upon another open space, turfed and not paved this time, and beyond it the Governor's house, looking solid and prison-like, but still a little more cheerful and less terrible than the living grave behind.

The Governor was not in the least official in appearance—a grey, elderly gentleman, with a cordial look and manner. He received his visitor with something more than courtesy, and shook hands as if he were pleased to see him. The fact was that he had heard of old George's amazing goodness, and, being himself of a kindly nature, was much impressed by the story. It is not every day in the year that a man who has been so ill-repaid for the affection wasted on a *protégé* chooses to act in this Christian spirit of forgiveness.

'At present,' said the Governor, 'the young man is of course unprepared. Perhaps, Mr. Bushell, you would like to carry him the news of your own benevolence, eh?'

'I should like to see him, certainly,' said old George, 'an' maybe to say a solemn word to him. You see, Mister, what a mistake it 'ud be if he was to be let out impenitent after all.' He was so falling into the part, that he began to regard all sides of it quite naturally. Those fears of possible detection had been purely nervous, and had not assailed his reason:

or at least he told himself so, now, when he saw the Governor so friendly. 'They was all mere foolery, of course,' said he to himself.

'Well, you know, Mr. Bushell,' said the Governor with a half-laugh, 'a prisoner's penitence is a thing the quality of which it is very difficult to judge until you see it actually worn and tried outside. "The devil was sick"—*you* know. And I dare say,' added the Governor, 'that while the sickness lasted, his penitence was real enough. That's the way with 'em here.'

'Ah!' said George, wondering what the man was talking about; 'so I should suppose. So I should suppose.'

'At the same time, I must tell you that the Chaplain thinks very favourably of the young man.'

'Ah?' said George. 'That's well. That's well.'

The schemer's hair was grey, his face was coming to be a good deal seamed and furrowed, it was pale just now, and had a worn look on it; immobile as the old rascal was, it was plainly to

be seen that he had suffered. His dull, slow speech, his almost expressionless front, with only that look of late pain upon it, had more effect than could easily have been fancied. The man looked so simple and genuine, not at all like a schemer against his *protégé*. A woodenly benevolent, good, stupid, slow creature! There is even a mournful admiring tenderness, a tinge of pathos, in one's thoughts concerning him.

'Would you like to see the Chaplain?' asked the Governor.

'Well,' said George deliberately, 'I don't know as it mightn't be as well.'

'Or perhaps,' said the Governor, 'you'd like to see the young fellow himself first?'

'Well,' returned George, 'I don't know as I shouldn't. Yes,' he added with a most involuntary sigh, 'I'll get that over.'

'Very well, Mr. Bushell. Come this way, if you please.'

George followed the Governor back into the gaol, and as he did so the nervous feelings he had been able to despise a few minutes ago returned upon him. It was not easy to despise

them now. Suppose there should be something in them, after all! Old George in gaol precincts, with the knowledge of his own criminal acts within him, was not the man to be happy in his mind. A warder went before them unlocking the doors, and fastening them behind, and at last he and they came to Corridor B and then to door 32, and this being opened revealed the figure of a man at whom the benevolent intruder looked with no recognition. The Rightful Heir, with sleek cropped head and clean-shaven face, looked up and knew his late employer; but the young George was so altered by his prison dress, and by the prison shears and razor, that the old man might have looked at him for five minutes without guessing who he was. The prisoner sprang to his feet, and, with head a little bent, stood in attitude of attention.

'Banks,' said the Governor, 'this gentleman desires to speak to you. I hope that what he has to say will make a proper impression on you.'

Now, the prisoner was making rapid pro-

gress towards spiritual perfection. He had forgiven all his enemies, theoretically, and he had cultivated all his own evil passions out of himself. For a month or two past he had been quite saintly, and had taken the deepest interest in his own spiritual symptoms. Yet he did rile up a little at old George's intrusion, and as the intruder walked into his cell the criminal's newly-holy soul went bilious on a sudden. For he remembered yet—he had never meant to swindle his employer—he had only tried to borrow for a month or two without asking leave, and he had been very harshly treated. He had prayed to be able to forgive old George, but human nature is fallible, and when he saw him he had no forgiveness for him.

'Do you wish your interview to be absolutely private, Mr. Bushell?' asked the Governor, withdrawing him a little towards the door.

'I think I'd rather,' said old George slowly. He meant to finish there, but perhaps a shade of disapproval or disappointment in the Governor's face, perhaps a half-frightened desire to propitiate him, made him remould the phrase. 'I think I'd rather as you was with us.'

The Governor was a little curious, and the situation was interesting.

'I shall be most happy,' he returned. 'Wait there,' he said to the warder, 'until I tap the door, and then unlock it.'

He closed the cell-door with a snap, and old George started at it. It had a strange quick sound upon the ear, that click of a prison lock, as I have before noticed, and even an undetected criminal may very well jump a little at it. But disturbed as he was, he recognised his private secretary now, and began to string himself up for the work which lay before him.

'Mr. Banks,' he said with laboured deliberation, 'I've come to see you on a most important matter—a matter as concerns you very deeply. You've had time, sence you was here, to think things over, an' I hope you've done it, an' as you've begun to see things in their proper light.'

The criminal with downward glance murmured to the effect that he hoped so and believed so. He was near the truth in one respect, though unconsciously—for he loathed old George, and trembled with anger at the sight of him.

'I'm willin' to hope so, also,' said the

Wrongful Heir, 'willin' an' eager. I'm glad to hear from the Governor of this gaol as the Chaplain believes as you're sincerely penitent.'

'I trust I am,' said the Rightful Heir.

'I'm here as your sincere friend, Mr. Banks,' the Wrongful Heir resumed. 'I dare say as you've thought many-a-time what an ill-judged thing it was you did, let alone the wickedness on it. I suppose, now, as you've found the punishment pretty heavy?'

'I have deserved it all, sir,' said detected criminality, playing to the Governor, but his inward speech was unreportable.

The undetected criminal flowed on.

'You've had time afore now to think o' what you've parted with through folly. Your chances was bright. You'd ha' been well-to-do an' respected now if it hadn't ha' been for that. You'd very like ha' been settled down an' married afore to-day, for I know what your prospects was.'

The detected criminal began to weep, for mingled rage and pity of himself. The undetected criminal continued.

'I'm glad to see as you feel your position that keen, Mr. Banks.'

Oh, the surging rage and self-pity in the little soul! A storm in a tea-cup! Ay, but the vessel trembled, and was like to break with it.

'I took a likin' to you from the first,' old George went on, encouraged by the effect of his own oratory, and somehow, in a dim sort of way, feeling himself wronged and magnanimous, 'an' you can't help allowin' as I did my best to push you for'ards. I was forced to prosecute, because it was a public dooty, but now you've been punished, an' I'm not desirous of no revenge upon you, not though I used to like you, an' you played me fause.'

What was this? the prisoner asked himself with a heart that fluttered in his breast, like a flag in the wind. What was it?

'So I've used my influence,' said the old scoundrel, 'with the 'Ome Seckitary, an' he's consented to redooce your sentence.'

The young scoundrel dropped on the side of his bed, which stood half-way retired in a niche in the wall. His head and the wall came

pretty sharply in contact, or he would probably have fainted with amazement and the revulsion of his feeling towards old George. He could scarce believe his eyes and ears.

'Banks,' said the Governor, who was moved within by this strange interview, though he was too self-possessed to show it, 'I trust that never so long as you live you will allow the memory of this generous forgiveness to fade from your mind.'

The prisoner was too amazed and agitated to say a word.

'I allays liked you,' said old George, 'an' I allays took a interest in you. An' now I've empl'yed my influence along wi' my friend Sir Jonas Crœsus,'—this had, as it was meant to have, a certain weight with the Governor,—'an' I've had an interview along of the 'Ome Seckitary. In a month's time you'll be set free, an' then you must try an' see if you can't act wiser an' better.'

Young George slid from the bedside where he sat, and kneeling there buried his face in the cheap hard rug which made his counterpane,

and wept anew. This forgiveness really broke him. It took him by surprise and by storm, and his sobs were torn up by the roots. He *had* been a scoundrel—he confessed it inwardly, at last—he *had* been a fool, he acknowledged it. For a minute or two the burden of his new-born gratitude was hard to endure. The Governor was affected, and blew his nose repeatedly, waving a loud-coloured silk handkerchief about in a way which revealed, whilst it was meant to disguise, his inward agitation. Old George stood there wooden and cold, but even he was scarcely self-possessed, as you may easily conceive. But neither of his auditors yet knew how far the benevolent creature's kindliness had carried him, and his grand *coup* had yet to be made, so far as they were concerned.

'Now,' he continued, when the prisoner's sobs had grown less violent and the Governor had ceased to blow his nose, 'this country's about played out for you, Mr. Banks, or at least I'm very much afeard it is. But it 'ud be cruel i'stead o' bein' kind to turn you loose o' the

world again without a prospict. Now, s'pose I give you another start i' the world, what do you say to goin' out t' Australia an' tryin' to begin afresh? I believe as you are penitent, an' I hope prosperous times 'll wait upon you theer. Now, what do you say t' Australia?

What was young George likely to say to Australia under the circumstances? I was about to say that he jumped at the chance: in reality, he crawled at it, for he turned upon his knees and made at the undetected swindler as if to embrace his legs, and had not old George retired precipitately behind the Governor, he would have done it.

'God bless you, Mr. Bushell!' he cried in a voice shaky with many sobs. 'God bless you, sir! God bless you!'

'I say the same, sir, as this poor fellow here,' cried the Governor, with the silk handkerchief in full play again. 'Yes, sir. Damn it all, sir, I say the same! You are a worthy man, Mr. Bushell. I am proud, sir, to have met you.'

'Thank you,' said old George, woodenly, and the two shook hands, whilst the forgiven

forger crawled back to his bedside and wept afresh. It was a moving scene, and the practical exponent of Christian charity, as he stood there, shook at the fancy—

'If they was to find me out, after all!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'I SHALL give you letters of introduction, Mr. Banks, to my old correspondents in Melbourne, in Australia,' said George. 'I'm afeard I shall have to tell the truth about you, because I don't rightly think as it 'ud be honourable to deceive 'em. I shall give you two hundred pound, an' a outfit, an' your passage-money.'

The criminal was broken indeed at this, and even the Governor, if there had been anybody to look at him, would have been seen to be visibly affected.

'I trust an' hope,' continued George, 'that being thus provided, Mr. Banks, you'll ha' no more temptation to depart from the straight road. It's that alone as leads to prosperity an' happiness, an' I do hope you'll tek it.'

Whilst he spoke thus, old George's conscience twinged him faintly, but then he re-

membered that in *his* case the obstacle to honesty had been quite insuperable lately. And at the beginning he had never meant to swindle anybody. He had only helped his errant nephew, Joe, as he was now helping Joe's son —and heir.

The criminal promised upon his knees, with tears and gaspings which almost made his speech inarticulate.

'This gentleman,' said old George, indicating the Governor, ''ull let me know, an' let you know, when the release which has been gi'en to you is to come about. I shall hope o meet you here, Mr. Banks, an' to accompany you on your journey, an' aboard ship I shall place the sum I've mentioned in your hands. I trust as you won't think as I'm a-tekin' undoo precautions, sir,' he added, appealing to the Governor.

'I think your whole scheme most praiseworthy and admirable, sir,' cried the Governor, 'since you are so good as to ask me my opinion of it.'

'Well, sir,' said George, his mission being

now accomplished, you'll let me know the date at which this young man's sentence 'll expire?'

'I can tell you that at once,' said the Governor, 'and as I am authorised to inform the prisoner, I may as well tell you here. This is the 29th. On the 28th of next month, being Monday, he will be discharged at noon.'

'I shall be here,' said old George with cold desperation, 'to meet him.' He turned to the criminal and said 'Good-bye.' The youngster took his hand and kissed it, and wept above it with inarticulate gasps of benediction and thanksgiving, until his benefactor lost patience and took it away. The warder came in answer to the Governor's summons, and released them, and young George was left to his reflections. They were bitter, but sweetened by touches of gratitude and hope and new resolve. He would be a new man, and in that distant land to which he was bound he would lead a frugal, honourable, and industrious life. Mr. Bushell was right. England was played out for him, and he could never more hold his head up where people had known him. But in a

new land he could take a fresh start, and nobody need know of his criminality. Thereabouts in his reflections a chill fear fell upon him. Mr. Bushell, his saviour and benefactor though he was, spoke of the need of telling his whole story to his agents in Melbourne. Would he, in that case, send the letter by post, or entrust it to his own hand? If it were entrusted to him, it would be easy to lose it; and with the upspringing of that defensive fancy in his mind, gratitude began to cool a little, and reflections about his own future to take the place of it. But the fit was so hot that it could not cool down all in a second, and before the young man could resolve to burke that letter in case it were entrusted to him, he was assailed by gust after gust of grateful emotion, and this condition lasted him for a week at least. Then he began to feel an amazing flutter about his approaching liberty. The prison barber had left off trimming and shaving him, and he used to feel his hair and rejoice to find it long enough to get a grip of. Looking-glasses have no part in gaol economy. Before his waiting month

was out, his hair, which grew rapidly, was long enough not to look remarkable, and he knew that he was pale enough to pass for one who had had a recent fever. At the first blush of his new resolves he had determined, amongst other things, on a very strict adherence to veracity. He made up his mind that nothing in the world should tempt him to deviate by a hair's-breadth from the truth. But before long he began to see what hard measure that was. He *must* lie a little. Necessity was laid upon him. How could he confess to anybody the real reason of his pallor, or account with accuracy for the shortness of his hair? That would be suicidal. He meant to be religious—he really meant to be religious, and the best of Christians—but did religion exact so rigid and even ridiculous a discipline? He thought not.

The Chaplain was often with him in these last days of his imprisonment; reading and praying with him, and doing his best to build up in the departing gaol-bird those principles of honour and justice the want of which had carried him there. He was not wholly excused from

work, but he was gently treated, and the Governor, being interested in him, set him to do certain odd jobs about his garden, and relieved his own kindly feelings by giving his labourer an occasional surreptitious supply of bread-and-cheese and beer. Circumstances alter cases. Fancy George Banks finding bread-and-cheese and beer luxurious! Think of him accepting the patronising presentation of it, and being grateful!

He was less grateful, perhaps, for this slackening of his chains than he would have been without the assurance of approaching liberty, and in a while the torment and agony of hope left him no room to think of mere gratitude to anybody. Time had never so dragged on his hands as now; but howsoever long it seemed in coming, the hour came at last —and with it, the man. At stroke of noon on Monday the 28th, old George led young George through the prison gates and into the street, where a hack-coach awaited them and drove them to a distant railway station. The Chaplain had prayed with his departing guest that

morning, and had given him much fervent advice. The Governor bade him 'Farewell' kindly and with hope. The dress in which he had been arrested was returned to him, and he was habited like himself once more.

He had wept anew with mingled feelings of all sorts at the parson's exhortations; and when his late employer came to relieve him, he felt amazingly affectionate towards him. The released convict felt that he loved old George. He looked at his unmeaning countenance, worn and strained and battered with the last six or seven months of misery; he looked at it through his tears, and venerated its owner. The good man he was—the forgiving practical Christian, who did good to one who had despitefully used him! In brief, the poor cad was quite melted and broken upon this occasion, and vowed amendment with all his little heart and soul. The past scarified him—his bygone hopes, his wasted chances; these make scourges for all of us at one time or another, and surely here was a time for a man's own hand to lay the lash on heavily.

'I can never repay you, sir, for your kindness,' said the young man brokenly as they drove away.

Old George had his own troubles, and their weight pressed sorely on him just then.

'Say no more about it,' he answered. 'Dry them eyes o' yourn, an' be a man, Mr. Banks.'

He was horribly afraid of being observed, not for any special reason, but in a general way. He was horribly afraid all round—afraid of being followed and taken back, afraid of being met by somebody who might somehow know his relationship with the released prisoner, afraid that the sexton at Waston Church was just at that moment discovering the loss of the certificate. It was a nervous enterprise altogether for a man of old George's mental build. He wondered darkly within himself whether such an expedient had ever been hit upon before, and he wondered at himself for having hit upon it. Whatever he thought of was perplexed, and entangled in his mind with misgivings and fears. It was not unnatural that he should, under these unpleasant circumstances, begin

to hate young George his companion. For it was as clear as day that, if that young scoundrel had not been a scoundrel, old George would never have experienced any of these troubles; Dinah would never have made her appeal to him, and he would never have known of his secretary's heirship to Joe Bushell. Yet, though he did begin to hate, he had his part to play, and his part was one of gentle friendship and kindly consideration. That was a *rôle* which he would have found difficult at any time, and now he felt it to be growing intolerable. George's tears gave him a chance for a partial outbreak.

'Mr. Banks,' he said severely, 'I'm a-beginnin' to regret a'ready as I took any trouble about you. You don't seem to have no sort of a man's heart in you. Be ayther a man *or* a mouse, will you? My Blessid! It's enough to turn your stomach to see a man a-goin' on so.'

Thus roughly adjured, George made an effort. He had been crying all day up till now, and it was not easy for him to subdue

himself. He had read somewhere the words, 'It is a terrible thing when manhood weeps,' and he got some melodramatic comfort out of that reflection even whilst his tears were flowing. For, though a small creature, he was complex, and had room in him for all manner of conflicting ideas and feelings at the same time, so that he had cried partly because he really couldn't help it to begin with, and partly because it was the feeling thing to do, and showed that he had a sensitive and emotional organisation. His eyes and nose were red and swollen with his tears, and his beard and moustache were as yet scrubby and stubble-like; so that old George, looking upon him, saw him in an aspect more and more unfavourable. The young villain had at least been personable, and now, confound him! he was growing positively repulsive to look at. And in spite of this, the elder scoundrel had to counterfeit some sort of interest and even of affectionate regard, for a day or two, until he could see him aboard ship for Melbourne, and have him safely dismissed the country.

Mr. Banks being reduced by his deliverer's admonition to an occasional gasp and snuffle of emotion, found in little time other things than his own emotions to think of. The question of the proposed letters of introduction occurred to him, and he began to wonder afresh. Would they be entrusted to his hand or forwarded by the mail? If they were forwarded by the mail, would it not be better to escape the stigma they carried with them—say, by a change of name, and by presenting himself in the search for employment elsewhere? Mr. Bushell had promised him two hundred pounds, and that, though not a fortune, was a good round sum of money to begin the world with. If work were to be had at all, a man of his presence, his business capacity and experience, was bound to be able to get on, and it would be suicidal to set such a millstone about his own neck as the proclamation of himself as a released felon would be sure to hang there. He would go this once into the house of the idol—he would be disingenuous in this respect only, and after that he would be good and true and honest. He had

had a roughish time of it; he had lost almost everything in the world; but for his employer's amazing and unlooked-for benevolence, he had lost all; and he was not going to disregard such a lesson as he had received; how was it possible that he could? But this particular new crime was necessary. He *must* promise whatever he was asked to promise, and then, being free, he must act for the best. After all, he would be only fulfilling his employer's desires of him, and doing his best to preserve an honest reputation. It was a pity to be thus forced and compelled into a course which he wished to loathe and abandon, and he was quite sure that, if the new baseness had not been necessary, he would never have dreamed of committing it. If a poor devil is forced to lie, how can he help lying? Everybody must admit the cogency of young George's reasoning.

The situation was singular: the young man chokeful of gratitude to the old man who was robbing him—the old man passing as a benefactor to the man he was swindling on so large a scale. And the young fellow, in the middle

of his gratitude and his good resolves, playing the devil with his own small soul again ; and his Christian benefactor looking at him and hating him like poison. Cabby, as he drove, little suspected what a load he carried, for neither of his fares looked like a released felon. Cabby's fancy was that the younger of his passengers had been to see a relative who had misconducted himself. So far as he—the cabman—knew, it was not a habit amongst the classes her Majesty holds in durance to weep on leaving gaol ; they did not even weep on going into it, if they were people of average pluck. Then, the Chaplain had shaken hands with young George at the gate with a hearty 'Good-bye, Mr Banks,' and both he and the Governor had raised their hats to old George when he parted from them. Like other people, the driver of the hack-carriage theorised, and when he had reached the railway station and had received his fare, he fell into talk with a railway porter, to whom he set forth how that pair was father an' son they wos, an' had been to the county gaol for to see a relation as was quodded theer, an' the young

un he was that cut-up he'd been cryin' fit to bust hisself, an' what a pity it was as men as had a chawnce in life should pitch it away voluntary-like, as a man might say. From which utterances on Cabby's part, I am disposed to think that, born in a less fortunate station of life, he might have given his imagination scope professionally, and have become a writer of fiction.

Half-a-crown and a hint to the guard found Mr. Bushell and his grateful protégé an empty compartment in a first-class carriage; and secured privacy all the way to Liverpool. On the journey the elder unfolded his scheme.

'I've wrote a'ready to Melbourne,' he said, 'an' I've told 'em as I'm a-sendin' you out theer to give you another chance.'

'Then,' said the rescued one to himself, 'I shall not go near your agents in Melbourne.' But he only looked at his employer with a meek and stricken air of grateful humbleness.

'I've put it for you as gentle as I could,' pursued old George, 'an' at the same time as strong as I could. I've told 'em it's my belief

as you are to be relied upon, and I've given 'em my guarantee for five hunderd pound. So if you go wrong again, Mr. Banks, you'll be black indeed. You'd be a-robbin' me again, an' I don't think you'd find the heart to do that—be as bad as you might—after what I've done for you.'

At this George the younger wept afresh.

'I implore you to believe me, sir,' he answered. 'I would rather cut off my right hand than wrong you again by a farthing.' He meant it, but he did not mean to go near Messrs. Nally and Tulson, of Melbourne, for all that.

'I believe you,' said old George stolidly, 'or else I shouldn't be actin' as I am a-actin'. That you may be sure on, Mr. Banks, I repose implicit confidence in your future well-doin'.'

It crossed his mind grimly that it might be no bad thing for him if young George turned criminal again out there. He wished him nothing worse than a new detection and a life's imprisonment. Hang him, the pestiferous thieving young Rightful Heir! It came natural to hate him.

'I shall find you a outfit,' said Mr. Bushell, 'as I've promised. I shall pay your passage out, an' I shall put two hunderd pound in your possession when you start, so as you'll have no 'casion to feel yourself tempted again. An' now, the world's afore you, Mr. Banks. Use it well, an' it'll use you well.'

'How can I ever repay you, sir?' said the deeply-affected George.

'Stop that snivellin',' cried the old man angrily. 'Be a man, an' try to be worthy o' my goodness to you.'

'I will, sir,' protested George; 'I will, indeed.'

'Do, then!' said the elder; and after that, they continued their journey in silence for the most part.

The appearance of the released convict was so peculiar by reason of his tears, that on his arrival at Liverpool his benefactor bought a pair of dark glasses for him with shades at the sides, and insisted upon his wearing them to hide his eyes. The youngster submitted gratefully, for he felt nervous under the pressure of strange

glances. He put himself under the hands of a barber, and when chin and cheeks were cleared of their stubble, he began to look presentable again. There was a suspicion of cold about his nose; one might have set down the swollen aspect of that feature and the pallor of his cheeks to influenza. The two criminals took a private sitting-room and a double-bedded sleeping apartment at the hotel, and old George locked his companion in the bed-room whilst he himself went out to make inquiries respecting the sailing of a ship for Melbourne. Finding that a first-class steam-vessel started on the morrow, calling at Queenstown only, and that there was still a state-room vacant, he secured young George's place, and then returning, released him, and took him out in the evening hurriedly to buy an outfit. For once in his life, he disregarded money. He felt reckless, and forcing himself to assume an air and voice of kindliness, he gave the exile *carte blanche.*

'Get what you want, an' get it good,' he said; and his young friend obeyed him. The outfitter kept one of those monstrous modern

establishments at which you can buy anything, and would sell you a cradle or a coffin with equal willingness, and anything you might want in your journey out of one into the other. A tailor measured young George, and a man in the shirt department measured him, and a man in the boot and shoe department measured him, and the customer ordered freely, as he would have done if the money to pay for them had been his own. For there was old George at his elbow:—

'You'll want this, Mr. Banks, sha'n't you?'

'Do you think so, sir?' he would ask.

'Certainly. You must ha' that,' and so on, until the repentant wretched George's eyes were moist again behind his darkened glasses, and he had to blow the tear-swollen nose to hide his feelings.

Before bed-time a vast chest and two portmanteaus, crammed with articles of apparel, arrived at the hotel, and Mr. Bushell paid the bill presented—and paid it, too, without even an inward murmur. The released felon wondered at his generosity, as well he might. It

was unheard-of and almost beyond believing, though his own eyes saw it. Ah! what had he lost by making himself unworthy of the service of so good a master! It had been actually said in his hearing at one time that old Bushell would probably leave him a slice of his fortune, and he believed now that it most certainly would have been so. Yet, through it all, the elder's manner to the man on whom he heaped these coals of fire was cold and forced, and wooden beyond words. There was something puzzling in it, had old George's manner been natural; as it was, the situation was almost inexplicable. But the exile was too content with his own astounding good fortune, and too full of gratitude and excitement, to puzzle himself at present over this singular problem.

The two slept in the same room, and the schemer kept zealous watch over his charge every moment until the hour for retiring. Then he locked the bedroom door and put the key beneath his own pillow, and the two began to undress slowly and awkwardly. Young George, valiant in his new resolves, knelt down at the

bedside, and the respectable benevolent old villain could do no other than follow his example, and being in posture for worship, he tried to go through some form of prayer, but the words stuck hard, and his head whirled. How, he thought, if he died upon his knees, defying God in that awful and presumptuous way? and at the stroke of that sudden fear he rose and began to grope about in a twilight splashed with blots of ink and fire; until young George, having finished his devotions, rose and found his benefactor wandering with vague outstretched hands in the middle of the chamber, and in much alarm helped him to a chair.

'Are you ill, Mr. Bushell?' he asked.

'I bain't well, Mr. Banks,' murmured old George hoarsely; 'I'm very far from well.'

He would leave Dinah everything, and let her know her son's whereabouts. But he could not part with his money until—'till death do us part.' The phrase came into his mind and chilled him strangely. He was defrauding 'the widow and the fatherless.' That was another phrase which laid a chilly and discomforting finger on him.

The Bible made *them* sacred, he fancied. If he died before that will was made and everything thus set straight again, he felt himself in peril. But the human conscience is conformable to reason, and after all he was acting very kindly to a man who had treated him very ill. And if young George got his money in the end, it would be more then he deserved.

Once in bed, old George applied himself to his pocket-flask in the darkness, and got some comfort out of it, though but little. One of his discomforts was that he dared not toss and tumble, since he dreaded to reveal his own uneasy soul. Nemesis comes upon us in odd ways at times. This may seem a small affair; but if you tried it through a night, you would find it mount into an agony. To lie there ill at ease, longing to move, restless, restless, and not to dare to move, to catch his breath and clutch the bed-clothes with his weak sweating fingers, lest he should groan out aloud; and all the time to stare accusing conscience in the face, and the coarse hell that ignoble and ignorant natures fear hereafter—was it a little thing? A

hundred times that night the old scoundrel thought the game scarcely worth the candle. And yet, how could he give his money up to a man who was ignorant of the fact that he owned it, and who, besides, was already overwhelmed with gratitude!

grey eyes looking afar off through the curate's Geneva gown and the curate's body. When the curate's bleating murmur was cut short all on a sudden, John awoke with a start from his reverie, and the organ's voice was the voice of love to him. The hymn being sung and the benediction given, away scurried John to shake hands with old Daniel. Daniel would not attempt to go homewards without Dinah. Dinah would not attempt to go without Ethel, and the young man was wonderfully fond of the old one. Not that he was a hypocrite, more than ever so little; he really liked old Daniel, found him interesting and odd, as he had always found him; but perhaps he was a greater chum of Daniel's than he would have been if the old boy had been more separable from his daughter, and his daughter had been more separable from Miss Donne. For this young man was in love full fathom five, and though he professed to know his passion hopeless, he fed it as often as he could. Whilst he shook hands with Dinah and her father in the porch, he had a lover's ears for the voluntary Ethel played inside. He would fain

have stayed within to listen to it peacefully, but was beset with fears lest for once Daniel should have persuaded Dinah to start without the organist.

'Good morning, Miss Banks,' said John, with the old air of guilt upon him.

'Good morning, Mr. Keen,' said Dinah, holding out her hand.

'How bin *you*, sir?' asked Daniel.

'How are you?' asked John in return.

Then the conversation languished, and lawyer Keen felt desperately guilty, under Dinah's gentle gaze.

'Lovely weather!' he said at last.

'Yes,' said Daniel. 'It's fine likely weather for the time o' year. It strikes a bit code to the bones, like, when you'm i' church though.'

'It does,' said John, catching at this conversational ark of safety. Aboard the theme he found footing until the organ ceased to sound, when he became silent again, and his guilty look returned. By-and-by Ethel emerged from the church—to John's fancy an angelic presence. Nor yet so far away from an angelic presence in

my own. Her eyes were like dove's eyes, as the old Hebrew lover said of his love's; her face as good and gentle as it well might be, a little pallid—the lover's heart was piteous about the cause of the pallor at all times, when he saw her—she came through a band of sunlight which lay across the porch, and the light glorified her beautiful hair and the creamy laces at her throat. John began to blush and tremble in the presence of this beautiful divinity of his.

'Good morning, dear,' said Ethel to Dinah.

'Good mornin', my darlin',' said motherly Dinah, with warm solicitous affection.

'Good morning, Miss Donne,' said the tremulous young lawyer, hat in hand. 'Good morning, Miss Banks; good morning, Mr. Banks.' And away he went, routed for the twentieth time, in spite of his resolve. That right to raise his hat and say 'Good morning' was all poor John got out of his lingering at the porch on Sundays. 'I haven't got the pluck of a mouse,' he said to himself reproachfully. 'Why can't I face her? Why can't I speak to her? Why do I look like a fool whenever she

looks at me? Ah, poor thing!' pursued the unvaliant John, 'she's had such trouble, it would be a shame in me to trouble her further. And of course for years and years to come, whenever any fellow looks at her as if he cared for her, she'll think of that scoundrel of a Banks. Of course she will! And I shouldn't care for her if I thought she wouldn't. But I'm not going to be beaten. If any other fellow comes in, in the course of a year or two, any decent fellow that she can like and be happy with—why——' John found that prospect unpleasant. A lover's thoughts are likely to be contradictory. The peculiarity about him is that, until he comes to look back at his own raptures and despondings, he regards them as filling up the most miserable time of his life. It is only when the time is over that he discovers how happy it was. My friend Mr. Francillon has put much philosophy into a nut-shell on this theme:

We doubted, quarrelled, tore ourselves asunder;
Faith mimicked falsehood, hope was like despair;
We doubt not, strive not; calmly now we wonder
Why we were happy, yet we know we were.

Then dawned no day but brought twelve hours of sadness;
Then fell no night but knew twelve hours of pain;
Now night brings rest, and day brings hope and gladness;
Yet—could we only love and weep again!

John went to church with great regularity; and, if he wrote satiric verses on the bleating curate, forbore to give them publication. The people of Wrethedale found no fault in him. He was as well-conducted a young man as any in the town, and walked with so much circumspection that even Ethel could see nothing in him to blame. And I may say here, that good and charming as she was, she regarded poor John with a very unreasoning dislike and distrust; and had momentary twinges of hatred over him, concerning which she rebuked and humbled herself continually. She had naturally a tender conscience and a vivacious temperament. Tenderness of conscience grew morbid under the hands of Thomas à Kempis, and her youth and trouble were sure guarantees for an occasional touch of anger in a woman of her complexion. You must understand that these contentions were inward, and that she rarely by any chance spoke an ill-natured word; but

she used to feel mightily indignant at thousands of things which a year before would have passed her unnoticed, and having felt indignant invariably felt sinful afterwards, and read her dear à Kempis with passionate desire to equal or come near his spirit. A good girl with lofty spiritual longings and a heart that ached.

'Dinah,' she said with some severity, as John walked away into the sunlight of the street, 'I wish that young man would not speak to us.'

'Do you, dear?' said Dinah meekly. 'He was an old friend of——ours.'

Oh the wound, the wound towards which every chance arrow struck anew in both of them! Ethel took Dinah's arm, and without a word or a glance, apology and pity flashed from each to each, for the two had learned to love and understand each other rarely.

'I likin' young Keen,' said Daniel; who, apart from the difference of sex and age, was of a coarser fibre. 'I wish my lad had took example by him. Eh, dear me!'

'Father!' said Dinah, warningly and beseechingly.

'Eh, dear me!' Daniel said again. It was little, but it was enough, and the two women's eyes brimmed over behind their veils.

Ethel, by special invitation, dined with Daniel and Dinah that day; and it need hardly be said that, after this reminder of their trouble, the table was quiet and the meal a sad one. It was easy to recover composure, but anything like vivacity would have seemed a crime and most unnatural, and not one of the three had the heart to be commonplace. So they ate in sadness and without appetite; and in a little while Daniel went upstairs for his nap.

'Sing me something, dear,' said Dinah; and Ethel sat down at the piano and sang hymns, until the elder woman put her arm about the singer's neck, and sliding suddenly down, knelt at her feet, and dropped her head into Ethel's lap.

'Hush, hush!' said Ethel, taking Dinah's head in both hands. 'What is it, dear? what is it?'

'Oh,' cried Dinah, 'I've been a wicked woman all my life: a wicked, false, deceiving *woman*!'

'Nonsense, dear!' said Ethel decisively. Then more gently, 'You mustn't talk so.' Then more gently still, 'What is it?'

'How can I tell you?' wept Dinah. 'Oh, my dear, it was all my wicked, wicked fault as he went wrong—as he was tempted.'

'Why, how could that be?' asked Ethel, with soothing incredulity.

'Oh! If I'd ha' told the truth from the beginning, if I'd had the courage to face the neighbours an' take my shame, he'd ha' had his rights—he'd ha' had his rights—I know he would!'

Ethel recalled the words which had fallen upon her fainting ears on the day of George's committal. 'The child I bore!' Had she not dreamed or misheard them, after all? Was this thing true of Dinah?—of Dinah, amongst all women in the world!

'Dinah!' she said, forcing the other's face upwards, and looking at her with an almost fierce anxiety; 'tell me what you mean, this minute.'

'He was my child!' said Dinah. 'My

mother passed him off as hers, but he was mine. An' I've gone through life with a lie i' my hand, an' now it's found me out—it's found me out.'

Ethel sat sternly amazed, and had nothing to say for a while. Dinah, thinking herself scorned, and wholly feeling that she deserved it, shrank slowly away and wept anew, holding her face in both hands.

And this was Dinah? thought Ethel; this was the woman she had so loved and pitied. For a second or two the thought was very nearly as terrible as anything she had yet endured. But as Dinah shrank away from her, the younger woman, with a sudden passionate impulse, cast herself upon her knees and snatched the sinner to her breast, and their tears mingled as they clung together, and Ethel rocked her to and fro as if Dinah had been a child.

'I don't care!' her heart cried out, 'I *will* love her. Whatever she has done, I will love her and hold to her.' The girl's heart ached anew with sudden pity.

Then, as they knelt there, Dinah told her

story; and it came out that the sinner was no sinner, after all. But when the tale was told, Ethel asked in amazement,

'But why, dear—*why* shouldn't the neighbours have known?'

'I'd lost my lines, darlin',' said poor innocent Dinah.

'You silly woman!' cried Ethel; 'what difference could that make?'

'You don't understand,' persisted Dinah. 'My weddin' lines.'

'Yes, yes,' said Ethel with tender impatience. 'What difference could it make? You could have got another copy from the church where you were married. The copy would be quite as good. You could get one now. You are a lawfully married woman, and you need never, never be ashamed.'

'I could get my lines now?' asked Dinah, with a face of wonder and dismay.

'Of course you could,' cried the other.

'At Waston Church?'

'Of course you could.'

'Oh, my dear, if I'd only ha' knowed it!'

And Dinah wept afresh. 'If he'd had his rights, he'd never ha' been tempted. Oh what a wicked, wicked foolish woman I have been! Ethel, my dear, forgive me for talkin' about him, because I know it hurts your heart as bad as it does mine. But, darlin', when his time's up, what is he to do? Oh dear, oh dear! He *is* my child, for all he's been so wicked. I bore him, an' I nursed him, an' I used to suckle him on the sly at first, as long as ever I dared. What will he do when he comes out? What can he do? Can I get his rights for him? Could I get enough to keep him and send him away out o' the country an' let him have a chance to be a good man again? Oh, could I, could I, darlin'?'

In the passion of this entreaty she fawned on Ethel and caressed her with imploring hands.

'Yes,' said Ethel boldly; 'I am sure you could. Whatever would have come to your husband is lawfully yours.'

'An' nobody 'd think,' asked Dinah brokenly, 'I wasn't an honest woman?'

'Nobody!' Ethel answered again boldly.

She scorned and hated young George now as well as ever she had loved him, for she had large capacities in that direction, and the one villain she had known had brought them into play. But though she believed that she would not have lifted a finger in his behalf, she could understand his mother's fears and longings, and her heart went with them. He was a scoundrel, but justice was justice; and even if he shared in the advantages of it, Dinah ought to have her right. 'And did Mr. Bushell know this before the trial?' she asked after a time spent in soothing Dinah.

'Yes. I went to him an' told him, but he pretended to misbelieve me. I went to the court o' purpose to tell the magistrate, an' I should ha' done it if George hadn't——'

There she stopped, and Ethel kissed her with chilly lips.

'I'm sure he didn't really misbelieve me,' said Dinah. 'I could see he didn't. But he's a hard man, my dear, and he was afraid of losin' his money.' She paused again, and hung her head when she continued. 'He miscalled me

very bad, my dear. He said he wouldn't believe a word o' my tale, and he told me'—her voice faltered lower as she repeated old George's words of righteous anger—'that I ought to ha' had my legs in the stocks for bringin' such a story to him.'

'He dared to say that!' cried Ethel, indignantly. 'Get your certificate at once, and take every penny of your husband's money from him.'

'If I could only get enough!' returned Dinah dejectedly. 'You know, it's his rights, after all, and what belongs to him belongs to him whether he's been good or bad.' Ethel made no answer. Young George was a terrible theme for either of the women, but in Dinah's case conscience was at work. It is worth notice that what are called the torments of conscience assail the best and leave the worst untouched.

Dinah found herself so pressed that she determined upon duty at any hazard. It was hard, after hiding so long, to make the revelation she was bound to make. But she had

sacrificed herself all along, and she was bound to go on sacrificing herself to the end.

'Will you come with me to-morrow,' she whispered to Ethel, 'if I go to look for it?'

'Yes,' said Ethel, with an air of resolution.

So next day the two women practised a deceit on Daniel and Mrs. Donne, and under wicked cover of a pretended visit to the market town they took train towards their old home, and, reaching Waston Church after a four hours' journey, sought the vicar and made application for a copy of the certificate. The vicar despatched a messenger for the sexton, and that humble official conducted them to the church. His department appeared to be looking up, and he scented perpetual heir-money in this new craze for certificate-hunting. The sexton was one of those people with whom single instances make habits. Two swallows furnished ample evidence of summer.

The dusty old register was brought out again, and the entries for Whit-Sunday in the year eighteen hundred and fifty revealed the

fact that thirty or forty couples had been united in Waston Church on that day, but the names of Joseph Bushell and Dinah Banks were not amongst them. Dinah and Ethel looked at each other in blank dismay.

'Is this the only register you keep?' asked Dinah, beginning to think that Ethel had been almost as ignorant as herself.

'Yes, ma'am,' said the sexton. 'That's the only one as is kep' here.'

Ethel, with a certain feeling of dizzy discomfiture, was turning over the half-dozen entries, rather to hide her own looks of dismay and to get time to think, than with a hope of finding anything. Suddenly she gave a sharp little cry.

'Dinah! Look here!'

Dinah came and saw nothing, but Ethel strained the pages open, and there, between the third and fourth entries for that Whit-Sunday, lay the root of the missing leaf. The eyes of the two searchers met with instantaneous recognition of the truth.

Ethel turned lawyer in a second.

'I suppose,' she said to the sexton, 'that very few people come to ask enquiries of this kind?'

'Not many, ma'am,' returned the sexton, with a tinge of sorrow. He suspected nothing, supposing the cry 'Look here!' meant no more than the discovery of what his visitors required.

'How many do you get in a year, now?' she asked.

'Well, ma'am, returned the sexton, 'I've been here seven years, an' you an' this lady is the second parties as has been here.'

'Oh, indeed!' said she. 'Has nobody been here since Mr. Bushell came?'

'I don't know the party, ma'am,' returned the sexton, 'not by name.'

'He would be here, I fancy, about six months ago,' said Ethel. Dinah was looking on at this with a scared face, but Ethel was smiling and gracious, and the sexton thought her quite a nice young lady. Her manner was one of sweetened commonplace, and the man did not dream that she cared a copper to find out anything.

'Oh, no, ma'am,' said the sexton, 'not near as long as that. Only a few weeks back, ma'am?'

'And he didn't give you his name?'

'No, ma'am.'

'It was sure to be Mr. Bushell, darling,' with a warning pinch, Dinah still looking scared. 'Wasn't it?'

'It must have been,' said Dinah, in a frightened voice.

'What was the gentleman like?' asked Ethel, in a casual way.

'Why, he was a stoutish elderly party, ma'am,' returned the sexton; 'pretty tall an' stout, with grey whiskers; dressed in black clothes, ma'am.'

'Yes,' said Ethel graciously. 'Thank you.' The sexton touched his forelock again and again at her gratuity and her smile. 'Good-day,' she said sweetly.

'Good-day, ma'am,' said the sexton. 'Good-day, my lady;' and away they went to the sunny road, leaving the sexton to lock up the despoiled register and close the church.

'My dear,' said Dinah, clinging to Ethel's arm, and speaking half hysterically, 'he's stole it to rob him of his rights.'

'To rob you,' returned Ethel quietly. 'Let us go back and think over what is to be done.' Then decisively, 'We must see a lawyer.'

If young George had only played his cards in his defence with an indiscretion less pronounced, and had never made that unfortunate deposit of the stolen notes, Ethel would have believed in him all through. It was only the memory of these things which prevented the revival of faith; and even as matters stood, she began to believe in an indefinite way that the younger scoundrel had been trapped into being wicked by the elder. To hate sin and love the sinner is a Christian maxim, but Ethel coupled a detestation of the sinner with her loathing of the sin even while she confessed to herself that the mother's right must be respected. And the mother's right was clearly the right to care for her child to the end, and to do what she could to fence him round from harm and to shield him from temptation. And Ethel

could bear less to think of him as sunk into hopeless degradation and compelled to crime, than to think of him as being undeservedly prosperous, and perhaps softened in that way to repentance. Her feelings and her conscience therefore went one way. 'Do good to them that despitefully use you' was a text which gave warranty enough for conscience, and her heart was wholly with Dinah, the full sadness of whose history she had so lately begun to comprehend.

The two conspiratresses salved their consciences that day by a brief halt at the market town, during which they made reckless purchases to account for their lengthened absence. They reached home dog-tired, Dinah quite broken by this latest difficulty, and Ethel roused to an almost heroic resolution. It is perhaps needful to explain, if only for the sake of a hasty reader who will not imagine more than he can help, how it came about that Dinah had at last confessed her secret. Whilst her mother lived there had been somebody to share it with, and the burden was divided. From that

time until her introduction to Ethel, Dinah had had but the merest casual everyday acquaintances; and if George had prospered, she would have been content to carry her secret to the end. But when the young fellow went so completely to the bad, and when the mother began to reflect upon his future, the weight became too dreadful, and a part of it must at any risk be thrown away. And apart from that, Dinah was desperate and at bay, facing circumstance with a tragic and heart-broken heroism of which only women are capable. The psychology of the case is simple. Her own sin of secresy in respect to the marriage had resulted in her child's sin of dishonesty. You and I would not put it so, but it was inevitable that Dinah should fasten the two things together in that way. Her sin had led to sin, and she must make atonement. So the poor thing confessed, as the first step, to one she loved, and whom she had helped to injure. What Ethel could not achieve she did. She hated the sin, but she loved the sinner still. He had gone in her arms as a baby, she had

kissed the rosy dimpled feet now so pierced with the thorns of evil ways. He was her child after all, though he were a thousand times wicked; and even now she would have borne his punishment fer him, and have rejoiced to do it. Foolish, but like a mother, and perhaps not altogether to be condemned or lightly spoken of.

CHAPTER XX.

'DINAH,' said Ethel next morning, 'did you ever ask Mr. Keen to tea?'

'No,' said Dinah, listlessly.

'Will you write and ask him?'

'Why, dear?'

'I want to meet him.'

'Why, it was only o' Sunday last,' said Dinah, 'you wished he wouldn't speak to us.'

'Did I?' asked Miss Donne, disingenuously. 'Well, I want particularly to see him now, dear. Will you ask me to tea to-morrow and ask him to come also. Ask two or three of the people whom you know from the church, and have a little party.'

'Ethel!' said Dinah, reproachfully.

'My darling,' returned Ethel with an air of determination, 'we cannot stay at the point we have reached. We must go on. That

wicked man must be punished for stealing the certificate, and you must have what belongs to you. Until we know what to do, we can do nothing.'

'But how will givin' a party help us to find out *what* to do?' asked Dinah.

'I will put a supposititious case to Mr. Keen,' said Ethel, losing a little of her colour as she spoke—'you find things like it in novels, dear—and he will never for a moment guess that I am offering him a real case. You don't want your secret to be made the common talk of the country, and we must manage it by ourselves. If we consulted a lawyer, you would have to tell him everything, and that would be terrible. You know what those stupid men do. They get things into newspapers, and make everybody talk about them. Now, when we know what is the right course to take, we can do whatever must be done quite quietly.'

'But if you punish Mr. Bushell, people will have to know,' objected Dinah.

'Not if you only punish him by frightening him and taking your money from him. I

believe they hang people for stealing from a church register. I am sure I have read that somewhere. And you don't want to do that.'

'Not for everythin' in the world,' cried Dinah.

'If you go to a lawyer,' said Ethel, confident in her superior knowledge, 'I am afraid they would hang him if they found him guilty. Of course he knows that, and when we know what to do we can frighten him, and make him give up everything he has of yours. It is right that you should have it. Let me write the notes of invitation. Shall we ask Miss Wade? "Miss Banks presents her compliments to Miss Wade, and will be pleased to see her at tea to-morrow (Wednesday) afternoon at five o'clock." Shall we ask Mr. Gimble the organist at Shareham? "Miss Banks presents, &c." Now to Mr. Keen.'

Dinah acquiesced in this programme with fear and trembling. Three young ladies and three young gentlemen were invited. Ethel promised to bring her mother, and the purchases from the market town were investigated. Most of them appeared to have been made with a

view to this stroke of policy, now that the policy was revealed, and Dinah meekly and timidly submitted to Miss Donne's overwhelming generalship. On the morrow, with fluttering hearts, the conspiratresses met again, and shortly afterwards the guests began to arrive. The Reverend Walter Boyper, curate at St. Stephen the Martyr's; Miss Boyper, sister of the foregoing; Mr. Gimble, the 'arrant duffer' who before Miss Donne's time had played the organ at the Martyr's; Miss Wade, an elderly young lady of some private means, known to be a devout attendant at the services of the Martyr, and suspected of setting her cap at the bleating curate. All these came, but no John Keen. Mr. Keen was waited for and came not. Tea was served and finished and taken away. The curate sang—

> What the bee is to the floweret
> When he seeks for honey dew,
> What the bird is to the boweret,
> That, my love, I'd be to you.

Miss Wade was understood to accept this as a delicate attention. Mr. Gimble, who was

popularly accused of a hopeless passion for Miss Boyper, sang 'The Heart Bowed Down.' Miss Boyper in musical response declared that she would marry her own lad, her own lad, her own lad; that she would marry her own lad, for true of heart was she. Ethel sang two or three ballads, and Mrs. Donne with stiff country dignity sat with her hands crossed and her toes together, and was deliberately uncomfortable. No John Keen, and no word from him. Daniel, who was getting more frail every day, went to bed early; and the guests, taking this as a signal, began to leave. The summer dusk had settled into summer night, and Ethel had but lingered for a word or two of hope and encouragement to Dinah, when a rapid step came along the otherwise silent street, and paused before the door. Then the bell rang, and Dinah went herself to answer it.

'Is Miss Banks within?'

John Keen at last.

'Come in, Mr. Keen,' said Dinah tremulously; and John entered, fluent in apology.

'I have been away to Borton, Miss Banks,'

said John, 'to a two-days' cricket match, and only found your note on my return ten minutes since. I ran up to say how very sorry I was to lose the opportunity your kind invitation gave me. I hope you have had a pleasant evening.'

'Quite a nice evening, thank you,' said Dinah, leading the way to the parlour. John with repeated excuses followed, and became on a sudden dumb at the sight of Miss Donne. That deceptive young woman arose with a smile, and shook hands with him. This was delicious, but so embarrassing, all things considered, as to be scarcely bearable. He half recovered his voice in a while and murmured, 'Came to apologise and explain; sorry to miss the pleasure; trust to have another opportunity;' and then, being again routed, said 'Good-night,' and turned to fly.

Ethel cast an appealing glance at Dinah.

'Pray don't think of goin' yet, Mr. Keen.' And she took his hat away and handed him a chair. John sat down in a miserable elysium, and Ethel began to talk to him. Mrs. Donne had some time since put a shawl over her

head and walked into her own house next door, through the wicket-gate which connected the two back gardens; and the guests having departed, John and Ethel and Dinah were alone. Dinah took no share in the conversation, but sat and listened with mingled expectation and fear.

'By the way, Mr. Keen,' said Ethel rather abruptly, 'I want to make an appeal to your legal knowledge.'

'Yes,' said John.

'You read quite unbelievable things in books sometimes—in novels, you know—and the critics often laugh at books for the false ideas the writers have about law. Now, I want to know what would really be the punishment for stealing a certificate of marriage from a church register.'

'Well,' said John, 'I dare say a judge would make it depend very much upon the issues involved. I should fancy the punishment wouldn't in any case go under a couple of years, and it might under aggravated circumstances run up to twelve, fifteen, twenty.'

'So much?' asked Ethel with outward innocence. 'They wouldn't hang him?'

'Oh dear, no,' returned John.

The two women felt horribly guilty, and one looked it. Ethel carried on her scheme with an excellence of mendacity for which nobody would have given her credit.

'And now, how would anybody really go about, in real life, to find a certificate that had been stolen?'

John was delighted to be questioned upon a topic of this sort.

'That depends,' he answered, 'on the date of the marriage. Nowadays, a man would be simply an ass for his trouble if he stole a church certificate of marriage.'

'Why?' asked Ethel almost too eagerly.

'Because,' said John, 'all the registrars' records are preserved at Somerset House. Suppose, now, that I wanted to prove a marriage, and some clumsy swindler stole the certificate, all I should have to do would be to go up to London, to Somerset House, and pay for a certificated copy of the register there kept.'

'That depends, you say, on the date of the marriage?' asked Ethel, as calmly as she could —calmly enough for John to see nothing, since he looked for nothing, but with enough disturbance to be seen by Dinah, who watched for it. Dinah's heart was well-nigh failing her.

'Well,' said John reflectively, any such crime would be quite futile if it attempted to hide a marriage which had taken place within the last thirty years. 'I'm not certain that even earlier than that it might not be trouble wasted, but of the thirty years at least I am quite sure.'

Ethel looked across at Dinah, and that glance completed what the journey and the discovery of Monday, the suspense of Tuesday, and the disappointment of Wednesday had began and carried on. Dinah broke out crying. Ethel was by her side in an instant with consoling arms about her. John looked on helpless and astonished.

'Don't, dear, don't! Hush! hush! hush!'

'Oh my dear,' wept Dinah, 'no blessing 'll ever rest on anythin' got at i' that way. Oh my dear, it isn't right. I don't blame you, my

dear, because I led you into it. You, as never spoke a word as wasn't true till now, an' me to lead you into such wicked make-believin'!'

'Hush! hush!' implored the exposed conspiratress.

John was more helpless and more astonished than before.

'What good,' sobbed Dinah, 'has ever come of my wicked hidin' of the truth? What good has ever come of it?'

'Control yourself,' whispered Ethel.

'My dear,' said Dinah, struggling to speak calmly, with indifferent success, 'it's been growin' on my mind for years an' years. It was wicked to hide it from Joe's father an' mother, an' it was wicked to hide it from mine. It's been a sin all along, an' now it's found me out. But I'll own the truth now, an' bear the blame, an' everybody shall know what a wicked woman I've been.'

John was more and more wonder-stricken.

'*You* a wicked woman, you suffering angel!' cried Ethel, folding Dinah's head to her bosom, and swaying it to and fro.

'I have been a wicked woman all along,' protested Dinah. 'But I'll lead nobody else into wickedness again. I'll tell the truth and bear the blame. Mr. Keen,' she said, lifting her tear-stained face from Ethel's bosom, 'I'll tell you everything, an' then you shall advise me for the best.'

'Not now,' said John, recovering himself a little. 'Whatever you may have to tell me, Miss Banks, tell me at some future time, when you are less agitated and more mistress of yourself. I would very much rather'—he went on in answer to the expression of her face—'I would very much rather not hear it now, whatever it may be. I should feel that your confidence had been surprised. Let me go away now, and if you see fit, send for me in the morning. If not,' he added rather vaguely, 'let us forget all about it.'

Dinah would have laid hands upon him, and have told her story there and then, but Ethel held her firmly.

'Mr. Keen is quite right,' said Ethel; and John, with those approving words in his ears,

made off. He was naturally much bewildered, although he, quite as strongly as Ethel, repudiated Dinah's self-accusations; and he slept none the more soundly for the curious scene he had witnessed.

Dinah after his departure exhibited an altogether new phase of character. She turned sullen and declined to listen to reason.

'I'll do what's right,' she said. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

'But, dear,' urged Ethel, 'we can get a copy of your marriage lines from Somerset House, now that we know they are there; and we can write to Mr. Bushell, or go to see him, and tell him what we know, and frighten him into doing justice.'

'I'll do what's right,' Dinah sullenly declared. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

'By all means do what your conscience tells you,' said Ethel. 'But it is surely not a matter of conscience with you to tell your private affairs to Mr. Keen.'

'I'll do what's right,' repeated Dinah. 'Nothin' shall change me.'

After this third declaration Ethel forebore to press her. Dinah, after all these years of self-repression, was in a mood to cry her secret from the house-tops, and she lay awake all night determining more and more to visit lawyer Keen in the morning and tell him everything. Whatever was done now should be done openly—so she resolved. Merely to shield herself, she had let her child go without the knowledge of a mother's love; and she thought now, with what unavailing longing only a mother may rightly tell, how differently all might have gone had she been brave enough to own him as her own. She could see now that almost anybody could have enlightened her ignorance about her marriage lines; and if she could but have used a mother's love and authority with the lad, she felt sure that he would have grown up to be a different creature. And since secresy and deceit had brought things to their present evil pass, she would have no more of them. Let everything henceforth be open and above-board. Much as she felt herself shrink from public notice, she would

rather that the whole world knew her story and talked about her, than have another secret to weigh her down, or endure the weight of the old one any longer.

Before Dinah could start with any hope of finding John Keen awake, Ethel came in again, and found the resolve of last night as strong as ever. All attempts to dissuade her were trouble thrown away, and in due time Dinah put on her things and went out, leaving Ethel behind, dissatisfied. Perhaps the dissatisfaction found root partly in the fact that John Keen was to be the recipient of Dinah's long-cherished secret, and that Ethel's own deceitful manœuvre was to be exposed to him. She did not care greatly for Mr. Keen's opinion, but she did not wish anybody to know that she could have found it in her nature to finesse and make pretences *in that treacherous way*. What would Mr. Keen think of her? How could he fail to see her as she was?—a sly and cat-like creature who had every right to be ashamed of herself. Oh, how she had deceived him—pretending that she had merely taken a case from

a novel, while she questioned him with an air of indifference on an affair of such moment. And suppose—lawyers took fees for advising people—suppose he should fancy that she had attempted to defraud him of his fee!

When John came to hear the story, he was naturally a good deal astonished; but though he was a young man, he was accustomed to curious stories in the exercise of his profession, and he accepted this one with little sign of amazement. Dinah laid the case before him with trembling, and expected to be rebuked for all her wickedness; but the young lawyer faced it with a business air, and seemed to have no great belief in her surprising wickedness. He made notes clear and succinct in form, and bowed his visitor away with a manner somewhat preoccupied.

'I will let you know something about the matter in a day or two,' said John. 'It is not at all a complex case to deal with.'

Dinah felt as if she had been speaking to a statue, he took everything in so cool a way; but when she had gone, the lawyer threw his

professional bearing aside, and travelled up and down his room, pausing every now and then with some exclamation of astonishment. He could afford to be astonished now that his new client was not looking at him; but he would not waste time about it.

'I shall have lots of time to wonder,' he said, 'as I go up to town.' With that reflection he began to pack; and on consulting a time-table, found himself in easy time for the London train. The railway station being at no great distance from his house, he himself carried his small portmanteau thither, and was whirled away to London; arriving in time to drive straight to Somerset House, and secure a copy of the certificate of Dinah's marriage. With this document in his possession he drove to Euston, booked for Birmingham, and before nightfall was settled in the smoky Midland capital. Thence he wrote to Dinah informing her of his first success, and in the morning he made for the country church in which the marriage had been solemnised. The sexton by this time was accustomed to the request

John had to proffer. It was getting to be quite a usual and ordinary thing for strangers to turn up and pay him for a sight of the parish register. He received his new visitor, therefore, with calm satisfaction, and ushered him into the little vestry with the air of a man who is about his common business. John, with the certificated copy before him, turned to the missing page, and found there the root of the stolen leaf.

'Who cut out this page?' he asked quietly but suddenly, and fixed a penetrating eye upon the sexton.

'Eh?' said that small official. If he were guilty of any share in the matter, he was a cool hand indeed.

'A page has been stolen from this register,' said John, tapping at the book. 'It has been stolen within the last six or seven months.' It was easy to guess that. Whilst the marriage remained a secret, nobody was likely to steal the entry. 'Who has had access to this book since then?'

'Who's seen the book, d'ye mean?' asked

the sexton. 'Why, two ladies as was here t'other day, and a gentleman as was here some weeks back.'

'Should you know the gentleman again?'

'Surely I should!' the man answered.

'Are you busy? Can you come with me—if I pay you for your trouble—for an hour or two?' John demanded.

'I ain't particular busy,' said the sexton. 'But what might you want me to do?'

'Wait a moment. Now try to remember very clearly. Did you leave that gentleman alone at all?'

'No, I didn't,' said the sexton stoutly. He saw a chance of being got into trouble, and he made his denial with considerable emphasis. To John Keen's perception he rather overdid it.

'What, not to get a glass of beer?' asked John, at a venture. He put that query to the sexton with a look so knowing that the poor man quailed, and capitulated surlily.

'Well, there ain't no harm in that, as far as I know.'

'We shall know more about that by-and-

by,' said John. 'Don't try to deceive me any more.' Beneath the legal glance the sexton cowered. 'How long did you leave him alone with this register?'

'Why, not above a matter o' five minutes.'

'You left a stranger alone with a church register for five minutes, did you?' asked John severely. 'Now, I am a lawyer, and unless you behave yourself to my satisfaction you may get into trouble. Are you busy to-day?'

'No, sir; not particular.'

'Then, lock these things up and come with me.'

The man obeyed, but paused at the church porch to ask—

'What might you want me to do, sir?'

'I want to see if you can recognise the man whom you left alone with the register.'

'I should know him among ten thousand,' said the sexton.

'I suppose,' said John, 'you know how to hold your tongue when it is to your own interest!' The sexton nodded gloomily. 'Then, until I authorise you to speak, be quiet, will

you?' The man nodded gloomily again, and it was clear that he was perturbed. 'I shall pay you for your time and trouble,' said John, relenting a little. 'And now come along!'

And John set out with the sexton beside him in pursuit of old George Bushell.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN dawn began to broaden through the blinds of the double-bedded room, old George, looking woefully worn and lined, sat up on his elbow and looked across at his *protégé*, who slumbered peacefully with his mouth open and his eyelids and nose still a little inflamed by the heat and salt of tears. Christian forgiveness and benevolence never wore a guise in which they looked less like themselves than they did in old George's case that morning. With his fluffy grey hair tumbled loose about his head, his eyes shrunken small, his wooden features puckered into corners and sharp edges, and his flannel night-gown opened at his throat, he sat and surveyed the object of his charity and shook his fist at him. The young man being evidently very sound asleep, the elder arose and began to dress with great quiet,

having it in his mind to avoid a renewal of the terror of last night. He dared not go upon his knees again—just yet. In a month or two, perhaps, when his wickedness was less fresh upon him, he might try to pray, and might fairly expect to be excused, but not then. So he prowled about like an ugly and dishevelled ghost on tiptoe, and having washed and dressed with extreme quiet, he put on his hat, unlocked the bedroom door, and went out silently. Then, having closed the door behind him, he began to knock at it loudly with his knuckles, and hearing a sleepy 'Who's there?' he entered again.

'Good morning, sir,' said the other criminal shamefacedly.

'Good mornin', Mr. Banks,' answered the old man. 'It's time you was stirrin', ain't it?'

The youngster obediently got out of bed and dressed, fumbling unwontedly with his garments, and confused by the wooden watchfulness of his companion. When, in accordance with his own resolves and his promise to the chaplain, he knelt by his bedside, his

ʿoughts were so full of a comfortless appreciation of the fact that Mr. Bushell was staring hard at the back of his head, that he did not even cast about for a form of words, but, having knelt for a decent space, arose and completed his toilet.

It was yet barely five o'clock, and there was nobody but themselves stirring in the hotel. Mr. Bushell finding time as heavy on his hands now as when he had lain tossing and tumbling in bed, naturally began to think the late estate better than the present, and regretted that he had awakened his charge so soon. He sat down by the window and pretended to read at a big hotel Bible which he took from the top of the chest of drawers, casting furtive glances at young George now and again. The released one sat constrainedly doing nothing, and wishing himself with all his soul at sea, and safely out of his benefactor's society. He had had no idea that Mr. Bushell was a man of such rigid religious practice as he seemed to be, but his beliefs in that gentleman were undergoing, or had indeed under-

gone, a remarkable change. Furtively he looked across at him and wondered. Where was there in his face a sign of that amazing tenderness he had shown? There was no such sign visible to the furtive watcher's eyes. If there had been in young George's mind the faintest ground for any suspicion of an interested motive, he would have leapt to that standing-place at once, and have refused to take any other, however plausible it might appear. But there was nothing of the kind, and he was lost in amazement and gratitude, though, in the midst of all his thankfulness, he was growing more and more resolved about the Melbourne question. He pretended to himself to hold that question open, but he knew that he was quite decided, and that the expectant Nally and Tulson would look for him in vain. Yet he was full of good resolves, and was profoundly convinced of the necessity which lay upon him to be honest in the future. He was going to be more than honest—he was going to be devout, but this one crooked step was necessary to enable him to enter upon

the straight path. Then, being once within it, he would never, never, never deviate any more.

Thus benefactor and *protégé* sat together, each busily engaged in the hoodwinking of his own soul, until the sound of footsteps in the corridors, the calling of voices and clapping of doors, bespoke the house alive again, and they adjourned to their private sitting-room together. There the old man ordered breakfast, and by way of maintaining his character, murmured a clumsy grace above it, which sounded, even in the repentant gaol-bird's ears, as though it were unhabitual. Breakfast, for which neither of the two had any great appetite, being finished, Mr. Bushell called for his bill and paid it, saw young George into a four-wheeler, and his luggage placed on top, and himself entering, was driven to the docks. On the way thither he drew out a fattish pocket-book, which young George had twice or thrice seen before, and producing from it a bundle of bank-notes, he began to thumb them carefully over, whilst the watcher's heart beat with a fluttering expectancy.

'Count them,' said the Christian benefactor, handing the bundle across.

Young George with nervous fingers told them off. Twenty ten-pound Bank of England notes. It was an amazing relief to have them in his hands, though, curious as it may seem, it was only then that the fear occurred to him that his benevolent rescuer might have remitted the money to Messrs. Nally and Tulson of Melbourne.

'What do you make 'em?' asked Mr. Bushell.

'Two hundred pounds, sir,' said the other tremblingly.

'Now don't let's have no moor snivellin',' said old George, rather brutally. He was afraid of being noticed, and at the bare thought of encountering anybody known to him he shivered, and a premonition of that dreadful swimming in the head came back upon him. 'Put 'em in your pocket,' he continued. 'Theer's what I promised you, an' now you're provided for.'

Young George obeyed like a man in a dream. Even yet he was not used to it.

'Now, Mr. Banks,' said the old man, leaning forward and drawling loudly as the four-wheeler jolted along the cobbled pavement of the street, 'I want you to understand as that ain't the last help you'll receive from me if you deserve it. The world's afore you, an' I look to you to do well. You'll be wise to give all your past acquaintance in this country the go-by, and remind nobody of your crime. If I hear good accounts of you, I shall do my best to influence your father to overlook your offence, but you'll be wise not to attempt to write to him until I advise you. D'ye hear?'

'I will follow your advice, sir, in all things,' said young George faintly.

'Theer's nobody,' so the old man cogitated, 'as he's likely to write to, left i' the place.' Daniel had gone, no man seemed to know whither. John Keen had faded out of sight. So had Ethel and Dinah. And young George was certainly ignorant of their whereabouts?—It might be as well to test that.

'You know as Mr. Banks has sold the Saracen, don't you?' he asked.

'I didn't know it, sir,' answered George with downcast eyes.

'Him an' your—sister'—he half boggled at the word, he had 'mother' so strongly in his mind—'an' the folks at Quarrymoor, have all gone away together, nobody knows wheer. But—' (remembering that this scarcely agreed with his promise) 'I shall try to find your father, and persuade him to soften to you a bit, if I hear good news of you.'

The young criminal began to think. If his father cut him off, and that was likely enough, Dinah would inherit whatever there was. Dinah had always been very fond of him, and was not the sort of woman to cheat a brother of his rights. He did her so much credit, and he began to see that there was hope, after all. *She* would not be influenced by Mr. Bushell, and it would be easy to find her. She could not have gone away and have left no trace behind.

The released convict did not weep any more, and his companion, though he was relieved by that fact, had upon him a contradictory feeling that the young man ought to

have been moved anew by his last evidence of trust and kindness. The noise and bustle of the docks were a great trial to Mr. Bushell, for he saw in every stranger a possible acquaintance, and the danger of detection seemed imminent and terrible. He rushed young George aboard ship, therefore, and went down with him into the saloon, where he began to feel feverish with suspense and fear.

'I'll mek efforts,' he whispered behind his hand, 'to find out wheer your folks are, an' theer's no manner of doubt I shall ha' found 'em afore you get to Melbourne.'

'It will be a long search, else,' said young George to himself drearily and with an inside reproach.

'If you want to write to them, send through me, an' I'll find means to for'ard your cause.'

'Thank you,' said young George chokily. 'Good-bye, old England!' he thought. He was going away a rescued felon, disgraced and disowned, and only (of all his friends) the man he had injured clung to him.

The steward approached.

'Better get ashore, now, sir.'

'Good-bye,' said the old scoundrel, 'an' God bless you! You'll be met at Melbourne. They'll know the ship you're coming by. I shall send 'em a message by wire.'

'Good-bye, sir,' said the younger rogue.

Old George gave a limp hand to him, and hurried ashore. Dreading to be recognised, yet afraid to leave until he had seen the last of his *protégé*, lest even now some stroke of fortune should prevent him from going, he lingered on the quay. At eleven o'clock to the minute, the splendid ocean-going steamer began to move; slowly and heavily she forged ahead; and old George, seeing his young namesake now on deck, ran alongside puffing and panting until she cleared the dock-gate and steamed majestically down the river. There was a great crowd about him, and hats and handkerchiefs were waving on the steamer and on the quay, and land and water alike sent out a cheer. Hurrah and good-bye from quay to deck and deck to quay. Hurrah! Good-bye! Hurrah! In a while all went quiet, and old George walked

away a free man. The certificate destroyed, the wicked Rightful Heir for ever banished, what had he to fear? He put that problem to himself a hundred times, and he always answered, 'Nothing,' though there was a dread within him which would not be appeased.

'What is theer for me to be afraid on?' he asked himself, and always answered, 'Nothing.'

But the voice inside said, 'Everything. The whole world-wide chapter of accident. Any and every little wind of chance. Me—your conscience!'

And as poor old George's evil fortune would have it, the very next Sunday morning, when he went to church, the incumbent at Trinity preached from this text:

'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

So Joe Bushell's son was following—with a difference—in the steps of his father, and leaving England and hearts he had made sore behind him. He was free—free to go where he would, and carve out his fortune with the lessons of the past behind him. Whatever

came to pass in the future, he would at least be honest. He went down from the saloon deck to the saloon, and asked for a small bottle of champagne, for he felt badly shaken, and needed a reviver. After that he was not going to be extravagant, but he could afford five-shillings'-worth of delight and self-gratulation after all he had endured. The wine, at his request, was poured into a big soda-water glass, and as he held it and watched the beaded bubbles winking at the brim, his heart sent up a bubble or two of joy to his eyes; and as he sipped, things looked dim and blurred to him, seen through those thin tears. He sipped his wine and thought. It was necessary to escape at Queenstown if he meant to evade Messrs. Nally and Tulson at all. Very well—but was it necessary to sacrifice his luggage? That would be a pity, and would be ungrateful into the bargain. The two portmanteaus were in his state-room, but the big chest was on deck waiting to be lowered into the hold. He finished his wine, walked out, and looked at it. So far, it bore no distinguishing mark—for in

the rush and hurry of his preparations, the painting of name or initials had been forgotten. George thought that fortunate. 'George Banks' was not a good name to go through the world with, after what had happened to the holder of it; and though he was registered under that title in the list of the ship's passengers, he decided that this was the last time he would bear it. Whilst he stood looking dreamily at the chest and cogitating, a sailor precipitated his thoughts into sudden form for action by preparing to hale away the trunk towards the open hold.

'Steady, there!' said George. 'Don't stow that away yet.'

'Ain't this for Melbourne?' asked the man.

'I am not yet certain,' young George said, rehearsing this final necessary lie of his upon the seaman before trying it elsewhere. 'I am booked for Melbourne, but until I reach Queenstown I cannot tell whether or not I shall have to forfeit my passage-money.'

'That's rather awkward, sir, ain't it?' said the man good-humouredly.

'Yes,' said George condescendingly. 'How long do we stay at Queenstown?'

'Eight hours, sir,' the man answered.

'Dear me!' said George; 'no more than that? I may have to stay in Queenstown for the next ship. You had better leave it out.'

'I'll put it in last thing, sir,' said the man, 'so that you can get at it easy. But there's no name on it.'

In a pocket of the suit of clothes he wore—the very suit in which he had been arrested—George had a card-case, and producing this, he drew forth a card and saw the man tack it on to the chest. Then he marched away to find the captain. They were in the Irish Channel by this time, and having lovely weather and smooth water. The first bustle of departure was over, and the captain was at leisure to advise a first-class passenger.

'Just before leaving my hotel to come aboard this morning,' said George, 'I received a telegram instructing me to call at Queenstown, and in a certain eventuality to remain there to await new instructions. In case I have

to stay and to follow by the next vessel, will it be competent for me to recover my passage-money or any part of it?'

'The company's agent will see about that at Queenstown,' said the captain. 'But,' with suave politeness, 'I trust you won't have to leave us.'

'I trust not,' said young George. 'How long do we stay at Queenstown?'

'Eight hours, sir,' said the captain.

'That,' said George, carrying on his comedy, and doing his best to make it look lifelike, 'is a very short time.'

'We move along, nowadays,' said the captain with a cheerful laugh.

'You do indeed,' said George. 'This is a very fine boat.'

'Anything else I can tell you?' asked the captain, finding himself summoned by his first officer.

'Nothing, thank you,' answered George, and so they parted mutually satisfied. 'A free man again! a free man again!' the champagne sang through all his pulses. A free man again, and not a soul to suspect him here. The lie

had prospered. It sounded natural enough—why should it not prosper? Who was to guess that he broke a compact with the only friend he had in all the world, by not going on to Melbourne? He talked to his fellow-passengers about it—what a nuisance it was, this probability of his having to stay in Queenstown—and they took an interest in the case, and had arguments about the probabilities and non-probabilities of a recovery of the passage-money, until George himself began to be interested in the matter too, and half-believed his own tale. He grew almost pathetic in his laments to a middle-aged lady with whom he fell into talk on the saloon-deck.

'I had hoped,' he said, 'to pick up health a little on the voyage. I have been longing for the sea for a month past.'

That was true enough, but the middle-aged lady would have been a little astonished if she had had shown to her the where and when of the longing.

'You do not enjoy good health?' said the lady.

'I do when I get it,' said George with chastened gaiety, and the lady was so complaisant as to smile. 'But I am only newly recovered from a fever. Had to shave my head,' said George with quite a fine-gentleman manner, 'and strap me down. Imagined all sorts of horrors, don't you know, and was really dreadfully ill.'

With suchlike scraps of imaginative autobiography did our youthful traveller beguile time and the middle-aged lady until the call to dinner. He already felt himself again, and if his gaiety was sometimes a little tremulous, what else could be looked for in a man so pallid—a poor fellow only recently recovered from a most prostrating illness? He declared on deck again in the evening that the sea-air was already doing him a world of good after the close confinement of his—sick room; and probably it was. His regrets about the sacrifice of the voyage, even for a week or two, were almost affecting. He had such a longing for the sea, and had so looked forward to it, and now, poor thing, his hopes were dashed. It is certain

that if he had continued the voyage as he began it, the ladies at least would have petted him prodigiously. A well-set broad-shouldered young fellow, with a handsome figure and a face by no means unhandsome, a pleasant tenor voice, a look and tone approaching to the look and tone of culture—a released felon, yes, but once Ethel Donne's chosen husband. Quite a taking young person, and almost in hysteric spirits just then, as might have been predicted of him, considering the circumstances.

He went ashore at Queenstown, and came back with regret painted visibly upon his pale and interesting countenance. His instructions had not arrived, and he was compelled to stay behind until the despatch of the next vessel. People quite condoled with him, and said 'good-bye' in the friendliest and most regretful manner, considering the brevity of their acquaintance with him. His luggage was put ashore, and the captain gave him instructions as to the best way of going about to obtain a consideration for his lost passage-money in the next vessel of the same line, and even wrote a

note introducing him to the Queenstown agent of the firm. The young gentleman tore his card from the top of his trunk and extracted the tacks. He had his portmanteaus painted with the initials 'G. C.,' and his big chest painted 'Mr. George Cheston.' He got cards engraved and printed with the name of Mr. George Cheston, and he shipped himself by the very earliest vessel to New York. And then, when he stood upon the vessel's deck and passed from Queenstown Harbour, he felt himself doubly free—free of the old crime and folly, free of the name associated with it. The past was wiped out.

> Ban, ban, Caliban!
> Have a new name and be a new man!

On the Atlantic voyage he made new friends under his new name—the name was the best he could think of—gentlemanly, but not too swellish, and represented, as we know, by an honourable family in his own district. His hair grew, his moustache was rapidly approaching its normal fascinating droop and curl, and his cheeks had recovered their colour, before the

ship's look-out sighted Sandy Hook. And how about his spiritual condition? Well, perhaps that was not altogether satisfactory even to the young man himself. A certain number of lies were necessary, of course. Or rather, let us deal gently with him, and call them—not lies, but—visionary circumstances called into being by the exigencies of the case, and employed necessarily as a background and plot to stand on for the new figure which now filled the place of George Banks in the scheme of the world. Grant that, under the conditions in which he was placed, a strict veracity would have been quixotic, and that a little new colour was excusable. The mischief is that when a man turns artist in that direction, he loses his sense of strict necessity, and seldom pauses at its boundaries. In brief, young George's lies were more than equal to the circumstances, and, led away by his new name, he had gone so far as to ask one or two people to give him a look-up at his brother's place in Staffordshire—Sir Sydney's place—Worley Hall. 'Dear old Syd'—so the good-natured youngster

was satisfied to call him—would be delighted to see any friend who had known him in America.

This newly-discovered relationship with a wealthy English baronet made it necessary, if only for the dignity of the family, that the traveller should put up at a first-rate hotel. One or two of his travelling comrades were doing the same thing, and advised him to follow in their steps. He was knocking about for his health, and thought of taking a run across the prairies, and seeing if he couldn't get picked up in that way. And so, fairly afloat on the pleasant rapids once again, he glided along quite gaily, with his laugh the briefest crackle of thorns, poor fool!

New York, like other places, is pleasant to men who have leisure and money. Our young friend engaged much in games of mingled chance and skill, and prospered so amazingly with the not very skilful but moneyed young Englishmen who had voyaged out with him, that his funds increased for the first month in spite of extravagances. But when at length they continued their travels and left him behind, he did begin

to think seriously about making a living. So many people already knew him in New York, that he could not possibly descend from his social pedestal in that city, and he felt that he must go farther afield. But whilst he considered what it would be best to do, he hung on at the big hotel, where he amused himself by night at pool on an English table, and pretty generally won at it. One evening, before the usual party had assembled, a grave-looking man of middle age strolled in, and asked for a drink and a cigar. Being provided, the grave-looking man sat down and smoked peacefully, and now and then sipped at his liquor through a straw. George had seen the new-comer at *table d'hôte*, but had never exchanged a word with him. The middle-aged man sat at one end of the table, and George at the other, and until now they had never encountered.

'It's a fine evening, sir,' said George in his pleasant tenor voice, as he lounged resplendent on a settee facing the grave man's seat.'

'That is so, sir,' said the grave man.

'I suppose,' said the friendly George, 'that

your climate is pretty severe here in the winter time.'

'Well, yes,' returned the other. 'That is so.'

George offered one or two other remarks of the same sort, and the two were gliding into talk, when some of the habitual pool-players came in and the game began. The grave man sat awhile and watched, until he had finished his drink and smoked out his cigar, when he arose and went away. Next afternoon George came across him again as he was leaning over the balcony with a cigar in his mouth and his hat tilted forward.

'Beautiful day,' said the young English aristocrat. The grave stranger tilted his hat back, nodded seriously at George, flicked the ash from the end of his cigar, and went on smoking. By-and-by he spoke.

'You are not long away from England, I believe, sir?'

'Not quite half a year,' said George. That day seven weeks he had said farewell to the Chaplain. But there was no need to tell the stranger *that.*

'I hope,' said the other with a singular mild gravity of face and voice, 'that you won't charge me with eaves-dropping, but I heard you talking last night with those young gentlemen at the billiard-table. You mentioned a place at home that I used to know very well when I was a lad.'

'Indeed?' said young George carelessly. He fluttered a little at this, and flourished a scented handkerchief about his face to hide a momentary confusion. 'You are an Englishman?'

'Yes,' said the stranger with the same mild gravity; 'a South Stafford man.'

'Indeed?' said George again, and blew his nose with violence.

'Excuse me for asking,' said the stranger, 'but I've been away now for a quarter of a century or thereabouts, and that's a long time. Has Worley Hall changed hands?'

'Oh dear, no,' answered George.

'Excuse me for asking, again,' pursued the stranger, 'but I heard you speaking of your place, Worley Hall in Staffordshire, and I

didn't catch your name. Since the old place is in the same hands, I needn't ask it. You're a Cheston, of course.' There the stranger's mild gravity gave way to a smile, and the smile was pleasant and inviting.

'My name is Cheston,' said young George, with an approach to hauteur in his voice and manner.

'So Sydney got married, did he?' said the stranger.

'Sir Sydney is my brother,' replied young George.

'Eh?' said the stranger with a new smile. 'Did the old boy marry again? I beg your pardon. But I should have thought you too old for that.'

'My father remarried comparatively late in life,' said George, feeling very ill at ease under this examination.

'Now, I should have thought,' resumed his companion, regarding him with candid friendly eyes, 'that you were six-and-twenty at the least. And you can't be more than three-and-twenty, at that rate.'

'That *is* my age,' said George stiffly. Had he been the man he pretended to be, there was nothing in the stranger's manner at which he would or could have taken offence. Of course there are ways and ways of asking questions, but the grave man's way was provocative of trust, genial and frank, though always tinged, even when he smiled, with a look which no man ever wore whose life had not been crossed by some very considerable trouble.

'I dare say,' said the stranger, 'that you've heard Sir Sydney speak of me. He was the last man I shook hands with on leaving England. Allow me to offer you my card. My name's Bushell—Joseph Bushell. Your brother and I were at school together, and were great chums years ago.'

George perforce took the proffered card and produced one of his own. 'Mr. George Cheston, Worley Hall, Staffordshire.' He felt singularly ill at ease, and would rather not have met an old friend of his brother's, though of course it was difficult to say so.

'Thank you,' said the newly-made acquaint-

ance with tranquil heartiness, 'thank you. It does a man good to meet a face that comes out of the old country. You won't mind my asking you—will you?—come and dine with me to-night, quietly. We'll go to Delmonico's and have a room to ourselves, and a good dinner and a good talk. Will you?'

'Thanks,' said the impostor, 'I am pledged for to-night.'

'Well, say to-morrow night. Come to my room now, if you've nothing else to do, and have a smoke and a talk and a glass of wine. Do!'

There was nothing else to be done, and the long-lost Joe haled off his old chum's brother to his own sitting-room and there began to pump him. But first the impostor, desperately, feeling it needful to clear the ground a little for himself and to carry the thing off with a good air, put one or two questions to him.

'I think,' he said, crossing his legs negligently, and speaking with a society drawl, very well managed on the whole, 'that I *have* heard Syd speak of you. You're a nephew of old George Bushell's, the great mine proprietor?'

'He wasn't a great mine proprietor in my time,' said Joe, gravely smiling again, 'but he was my uncle. He's alive?'

'Oh yes,' said George, somewhat recovering his ease. 'I know the old boy well.'

'His brother Joe, my father,' asked Joe—'is he alive?'

'No,' returned George, rather startled by this question. 'I've heard he died before I was born. You didn't know that?'

'No,' said the other gravely. 'I didn't know it.'

'You bolted?' said George, growing more and more inured to the situation.

'Yes,' said Joe Bushell. 'I ran away from home.'

'You lost a pot of money by it,' said George easily. 'I've heard Syd say that your governor left your Uncle George a quarter of a million.'

'So much as that?' said Joe quietly. 'Well, I'm glad Uncle George had it. He was a good old fellow was Uncle George.' He sighed inwardly and murmured to himself, 'Poor old dad!'

'Eh?' said George.

'Nothing. There are great changes in the place, I suppose?'

'Great changes. Town Hall and Free Library in the High Street. Two or three new banks. The place grows, sir, rapidly.'

'Ah! No doubt — no doubt. Great changes—great changes.'

His drooping head crushed his brown beard upon his breast, and his voice fell again into a murmur as he repeated, 'Great changes.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THERE was a memory somewhere for Joe Bushell in the face of his new acquaintance Mr. George Cheston, his old companion's younger brother—a suggestion which touched him curiously, perplexing him the while. It was not a memory of Cheston, for the young man was not like Cheston in the least. Was it——? no—Hang it! *What* was it? They could never have met before, of course, and yet Joe was certain that he had seen the face somewhere. The fact was that the young scoundrel was unworthily like his mother, and that it was his resemblance to her which at once attracted and puzzled his father. Joe felt, but could not trace, the likeness—could not identify it with anybody; but his heart warmed to the youngster.

'And so,' he said, 'my uncle's a great mine-owner, is he?'

'One of the richest men in the district,' said George, pulling away at one of his host's cigars. 'This is good tobacco.' He was not going to be over-interested in the conversation, having a general notion that a gentleman born and bred ought to be really interested in nothing which does not concern himself. Not to admire was all the art he knew.

'I suppose he's still a bachelor?'

'Quite superior to feminine blandishments, I fancy,' said George. 'One couldn't fancy him making love under any sort of circumstances.'

'No,' said Joe, lingering on the word. 'I suppose not. Has everybody quite given me up for dead on that side the water, do you know?' He put this question with a short laugh which had no merriment in it, whatever other feeling might be there.

'Well,' answered George, casting himself luxuriously back in his chair and blowing a lazy cloud, 'I'm almost inclined to think they have. Syd has, I know.'

'It was an odd old place, as I remember it,'

said Joe after a little pause. 'There used to be a lot of queer buildings about—gables and dormer windows, and so on. I suppose that's all changed?'

'Yes,' said George, his mind recurring to the Saracen, of whose altered condition he was of course unconscious. His companion struck his very thought.

'Their notions of an hotel in that part of the world used to be primitive,' said Joe, approaching the ground he wanted to get at with great caution. 'I suppose they haven't got to this pitch even yet?'—waving his hand abroad as he spoke.

'Not exactly,' George replied.

'The Saracen's Head was one of the oldest of those places in my time,' said Joe with apparent carelessness. 'Do you know it?

George was blowing his nose again, and looked up a little flushed, perhaps by the violence of the exertion.

'I beg pardon?'

'The Saracen's Head,' said Joe again. 'Is it standing yet?'

'The Saracen?' said George with counterfeited reverie. 'The Saracen?'

Joe helped him to the topographical lines, and added:

'Old Sir Sydney, your father, always pulled up there for a glass of home-brewed when he rode over to the petty sessions, Wednesdays and Saturdays.'

'Ah, yes! I know it now,' said George with a creditably realistic air of sudden remembrance. 'Syd calls there sometimes in the same way. Yes, yes. I know it. Of course.' Before he had become altogether too grand a young man, he had indeed served with his own hands that glass of home-brewed the genial baronet loved. He bore the unexpected turn the talk had taken with great *sang-froid*, after the first inquiry had been made and answered.

'I used to be there a good deal myself,' said Joe, 'when I was a youngster. They had the first billiard-table there that ever was introduced to that part of the world. Old Banks used to keep it—Daniel Banks. I suppose he's gone, too?'

'I fancy not,' said George. 'I believe he has retired. Some family troubles, I think I heard.'

He felt his coolness under fire to be creditable to him.

'Family troubles?' asked Joe.

'I don't know, I'm sure,' George answered, yawning a little, as if the conversation bored him. But his companion was casting about in his mind how to get further, and the by-play was lost upon him.

'When I was a lad,' said Joe, hardening his heart for the leap, 'I used to think old Daniel's daughter the prettiest girl in the world. You don't know whom she married, do you?'

'Married?' said George, thrown off his guard for a second.

'Yes,' answered the other—'married.'

'You don't mean ——? Confound it—what's the woman's name?—Dinah?'

'Yes, I do,' returned Joe. 'She married two or three-and-twenty years ago.'

'I'll be hanged if she did,' said George with well-bred languor. 'She's an old maid.'

'What?' cried Joe. Then moderating his voice and manner, 'My uncle wrote and told me she was married, if I'm not mistaken.'

'Twasn't true, if he did,' said George, yawning outright this time.

'I think you must be mistaken,' said Joe. 'You must be.'

'Sure I'm not,' said George, casting his arms abroad and gaping lazily.

'But you scarcely remembered the house just now?'

'I remember it well enough now you call it to mind,' said George, recovering from his yawn. 'Syd used to call there, and he was a little sweet on Dinah, too, in a quiet sort of way. No harm in it, you know, for I believe she's always been a deuced good sort of woman —religious, you know; that sort of thing.' And the aristocratic youth yawned again, stretching forth his arms with luxurious abandonment. Perhaps, had his companion had a reason for watching, he might have caught a tone of tremor in the young rascal's voice, and have thought the want of interest overdone.

'Not married!' said Joe in a bewildered way. 'Then, why the deuce should my uncle George have said she was?'

'Made a mistake, I suppose,' said George, more languid and fine-gentlemanlike than ever. 'Tell you what makes me so sure about it. Day I left Liverpool I met old Bushell—beg your pardon—mean your uncle, you know—and he told me, just as a scrap of local news, that old Banks had retired, and that he and Miss Banks—what's her name?—Dinah—had gone away and left the place.'

Joe had *his* reasons for the disguise of emotion too. George, in his cunning, thought he saw it all. Joe Bushell and his sister would be contemporaries, and it was quite likely that young Joe had been in love with her. His uncle George had probably invented the fiction of the marriage to prevent young Joe from making a bad match. It was not easy for him to think that a man so forgiving and generous could have told the lie in order to secure a hold of young Joe's fortune. It came easy to him to think ill of people as a rule, but he

could not yet think any great evil of his benefactor.

And as for Joe himself, he had cherished in his own heart so long the memory of Uncle George's ancient kindness that it was almost impossible to begin a new estimate of the man at this time of day. When he was friendless and alone, his uncle had sought him out and had given him a hundred pounds—a generous gift—a sum not lightly to be given away by anybody to a mere runaway young rascal of a nephew. Why should he have written to tell him that Dinah Banks had married?

'She was a very pretty girl,' said Joe, clearing his throat with difficulty. 'I should have thought she'd have had heaps of chances.'

'Ye-es,' returned George, rising and strolling to a window. 'I think I've heard so. But she's a middle-aged woman now, you know, and rather out of my line. I'm told Syd used rather to rave about her.'

Faithful to him! Faithful to him after all, through all these heavy years! It would have

gone ill with errant Joe indeed, if there had been no heart-ache in the thought.

It is worth noticing, as a fact in the constitution of humanity at large, that whether I do my duty well or ill, or howsoever you do yours or leave it undone, we both alike expect the outer world to do *its* duty, to be faithful in the performance of its promises, and long-suffering in respect to injury, and generally to act up to a standard which we acknowledge to be beyond our reach. And, in like fashion, Joe had felt keenly at the time that Dinah might have waited a little longer. He acknowledged his own unworthiness with constant and deep abasement, but she might have been worthier. Out of that mood he had grown into excuses for her and explanations, and he had found a self-tormenting pleasure in thinking of her as a married woman with her family growing up about her, and himself a mere dim remembrance in her mind.

It had not all gone smoothly with the callow-whiskered, blue-eyed, foolish lad who left home in so undignified and unmanly a fashion so many years ago.

Nobody ever told a story completely—not even a Chinese dramatist. For on every character in any story the influences of a whole world are pouring every day, and the most painstaking of chroniclers must let some things be taken for granted. I cannot do more than indicate young Joe's history here. If you want to appreciate the outer changes which have come upon him, think of the alterations time has worked on any young fellow you may have known five-and-twenty years ago. A lithe figure grown set, a figure but an eagle's talon in the waist grown portly, a smooth face lined and bearded, an open brow corrugated, locks crisp and curled and golden turned to a darker shade and streaked with grey, and may-be a little thinned at top. Young Joe, whose folly was the fount and origin of this history, has lost his claim to the distinctive epithet, and is young no more.

I have never sought to conceal from myself my opinion of his conduct. He acted badly, criminally, like a fool. I know it. I admit it. But there are men whose failings

we condone, whose follies we forgive, whose sins we pity. Let young Joe be of them. He was sinned against as well as sinning. Women who read this story will probably be hard upon him in their judgments—and will be right, beyond a doubt. But many years of poverty and remorse are in themselves hard judgment on a man; and he had suffered, as you and I do when we misbehave ourselves; and had grown wiser and better, as you and I sometimes fail to do.

The long-errant Joe has sinned and suffered and amended. Let us take him back again to friendship.

The story of a wild, disjointed life such as he had lived most of these years of absence would hardly pay for telling here. He did a hundred things for a living, and throve at none of them, until he got a berth aboard a river steamer, and after two or three years became a river pilot. Then, having in the course of two or three years more saved a little money, he went westward to Frisco, and there started a store in partnership with another Englishman,

who was loud at morning, noon, and night with denunciations of American dishonesty. When they had made a nice little pile together, this true-born Briton took advantage of a fever from which his partner suffered, and realising the whole estate, he fled, taking ship for Hong-Kong, and leaving Joe behind him, friendless, delirous with fever, and without one cent to chink against another. At this terrible juncture turned up a bearded ruffian, by name MacKane, who, by way of giving his own life-history the lie, nursed the stranger through his fever, and saw him back to health again. MacKane had money, and thought well to invest it. He trusted Joe at sight, after the curious manner of his kind, and the two started a store on the old lines—Joe finding knowledge of the business, and MacKane providing the stock. The two throve amazingly in their business, and went in for land-jobbing with equal success. Then MacKane, who was a noble fellow but a confirmed rowdy, fell sick of a revolver bullet and died, bequeathing everything to his partner. And so from small

things to big, and from big to bigger, progressed Joe Bushell, and he was now here in New York to arrange the sale of a considerable property in a western town on the great Pacific line; a man firmly established on a broad business bottom, and highly respected by all who knew him—first for his dollars (dollars provide the shortest cut to judgment), and next for his sterling and blameless private character.

He had quite made up his mind to end his days in the country of his adoption, and was resigned to see England no more. But this most strange news of Dinah put all his resolutions out of joint. He could see now that he was in reality a thousand times as criminal as he had thought himself, self-condemning as his thoughts had always been. Not happy, not forgetful, not married and comforted by the love of children, but living to a cold and long-since widowed middle age. Ah! that made a difference. He tried to picture her as she would be after so long a space; but could do nothing but recall her as she said, 'No, Joe, no; you couldn't have the heart to leave me!' And

then again: 'Go, and God bless you, my own dear, dear, ever dearest Joe!' And then again: 'Will you let me keep my marriage lines?' His last failure towards her! And then the waving hand, the tear-soiled face, the pretty figure in white muslin, and the demurely-coquettish straw hat! He heard and saw again, though it was all so old and far away.

Meantime, as Joe sat unconsciously smoking, with the voice of his youth's wife in his ears and her form in his eyes, his visitor stood at the window congratulating himself, in spite of a faint conscientious qualm, on the success of his assumption of his character. It was an odd chance which had thrown him into the company of a relative of his late employer's; but the association was not likely to last long, and might be turned to some advantage while it lasted. For Joe, though five-and-twenty years since a runaway from home, had now a look of solid and settled prosperity, and his being in this swell hotel at all argued him fairly well-to-do. These Bushells had a knack of making money; and this one, so George

argued naturally enough, would scarcely have spoken lightly of that lost quarter of a million, unless he himself had been well provided for. When a man is able to say of so vast a sum, 'I am glad somebody else has it,' because somebody else is a good fellow, it argues prosperity on his own part.

Joe, emerging from his reflections, broke in upon this reverie.

'When do you think of going back to England, Mr. Cheston?'

'Well, I am not at all decided,' said George, turning round upon him. 'I've been thinking of getting on for the prairies, or perhaps of seeing what sport the Dominion has to show.'

'What do you say to a run across to San Francisco?' asked Joe. 'I'm settled there, and I'm thinking of taking a run over to the old country after going home to set things straight. Will you come across with me? You'll get a good view of the continent, and we can make a stay here and there if you like. I am not in any hurry, and I'm so pleased at

meeting a man from the old place that I shall really take it as a favour if you'll come.'

'Why, thank you,' said the impostor; 'you're very kind. I should like the journey amazingly.' The magnitude of the hotel bill had begun to frighten him. At the rate at which he was going, his resources would not last long.

So the thing was settled, and, whilst Joe waited for the arrangement of his business in New York, the two saw a good deal of each other. The prosperous trader was free with his money, and whatever they did together he paid for—an arrangement which met George's views to a hair, though he made a conventional-propriety struggle in pretence of a desire to disturb it now and then. When Joe had known old Sir Sydney and his son, the family had not been wealthy, and he liked the young fellow none the less that he did not seem quite reckless in his expenditure. A man who took a liking for people readily, Joe soon bred a fancy for his companion, and was never weary of talking with him about the old place, and

the people he had known. He gave the young man an insight into his own experiences, and told him candidly of his first hard struggles in the land of his adoption; and he played, in short, the part of guide, philosopher, and friend to him.

They had known each other for a fortnight or thereabouts, when Joe turned upon the youngster and said:

'Look here, Cheston. I can ask a favour of your brother's brother, I know, and I am going to do it.'

'Certainly,' said young George, not quite in comfort. Was Bushell not so well-to-do as he had thought him?

'I've told you already that I have an idea of running over to England. As you say, everybody no doubt thinks me dead and done for; but I want to have a look at the old place, and I don't want it to be talked about. You needn't tell anybody that you met me here when you go back again. You can tell Syd, if you like'—he had fallen into George's way of speaking of his old friend—'and I think it's

more than likely I shall call upon him. But when a fellow's been away as long as I have, there's a sort of shamefacedness about going back again, and I'd rather that nobody knew anything about it. I dare say it's a bit sentimental, but you won't say anything about me, will you?'

'Decidedly not, since you wish me not to,' returned George.

'I'm not in a—in a downright hurry,' Joe continued, 'and I have a good many things to see to before I can start.' He was curiously reluctant to go back, and yet he felt that he could not help himself. To return to Dinah and offer her the fag-end of his life seemed base and cruel. She thought him dead. Let her think him so. It would be brutal to disturb her peace again at this late hour. And, even if he went at all, he longed for some companionship, however slight, some living tie with the home he had deserted. 'Do you think we can manage to go back together?'

'In how long?' asked George.

'Well, when you like, in reason,' Joe

answered. 'Say I shall be able to start in three months' time: would that suit you?'

'Yes, I think so,' said George. It would be easy to dodge the fellow at the finish, and three months was a lift, certainly. If he could only rely upon a part of it, it would be something. 'That will suit me very well.'

'We could go to Syd together,' Joe suggested.

'Yes, of course,' replied George, with an inside vacuum at the fancy.

Matters being thus arranged, and Joe's business being shortly afterwards prosperously settled, they paid their bills—making a considerable inroad on George's reserves—and took the cars. They broke the journey here and there, and made it last them three weeks from start to finish. From the hour of leaving New York, Joe took upon himself the part of host, and insisted upon paying for everything. George could scarcely disguise the shock to his feelings which the bill at the great hotel afforded; and Joe, observing his discomfiture at that moment, was resolute in not permitting

him to spend a dollar anywhere upon their joint expenses. This was comfortable; but, like other conditions in life, George found that his association with Mr. Joseph Bushell had its drawbacks. Joe made him keep a diary of his journey for Sir Sydney's perusal, and was always badgering George to write to him, and giving him messages, and pledging him to pledge dear old Syd to secresy. And at last, on reaching San Francisco, Joe took the matter into his own hands.

'I say, Cheston, about that letter you're always promising to write to Syd. Do it now, there's a good fellow. Come now, here's pen, ink, and paper. We'll arrange what to say about our meeting and about my going over to England.'

'Leave a fellow alone a little while after dinner,' said George.

'I notice,' said Joe seriously, 'that you're a dilatory fellow, Cheston. Now—I mean it in a friendly way, I assure you—that's bad. Procrastination is one of the worst habits a young fellow can form. Come, now.'

He stood with a pen in one hand inviting George to come forward, and after a moment's pause secured obedience.

'Here,' said George, taking the pen and seating himself, 'tell a fellow what to say.' He feigned a little touch of sulkiness to hide his embarrassment.

'Very well,' said Joe. 'Put down the date and all that; now, "My dear Syd," or "My dear Brother," or however you write to him.'

'"My dear old Syd," said George, sulkily writing.

'Very well. "My dear old Syd,—I have the very strangest news to give you. I am writing this letter under the roof of an old schoolfellow and friend of yours, Joe Bushell. I found him out almost by accident in New York. I told him that you had long since given him up for dead and buried. He was awfully glad to see a face from the old country, and especially a brother of yours. He was immensely surprised to learn who I was, and had no idea that the governor had married a second time.

He has prospered very much out here, and thinks of running over with me to England, so that you must expect to see us both together. You will remember the circumstances under which he left home, and will understand what I am now about to ask. Pray say nothing about his projected visit. He is just coming over to see old places and one old friend—yourself. He does not intend to make himself known to anybody else. He desires me to put this to you with all needful strength, and of course in saying that I have said more than enough. He sends his most friendly regards. I will advise you of the probable time of our arrival."—All that down?'

'Yes,' said George, 'it's all down.'

'Very well. Now you can go on with your own affairs.'

'Oh, that's enough for a letter,' cried the young man with an air of disgusted fatigue; 'I hate letter-writing.'

'All right,' said Joe. 'Close up as soon as you like.'

'"I am,"' murmured George, scrawling

away, '"my dear old Syd, your affectionate brother,—George."'

'Here's an envelope: address it,' said Joe, almost hilarious in manner. He was thinking of Dinah all the time, thinking with much bitter self-upbraiding, and it needed some bustle to keep his heart up.

'"Sir Sydney Cheston, Bart.,"' murmured George, as he dashed off the address in a sprawling and unclerkly hand, '"Worley Hall, Staffordshire, England."'

'That's right,' said Joe, pulling at the bell. 'Post that at once,' he said, handing the letter to the maid who entered in answer to the summons. 'And now,' he cried, throwing himself into a chair and looking across at George with a face of resolve, 'I'm bound to go. I wanted to go, and I couldn't make my mind up; and now I've done it, because a promise *is* a promise, and the thing's arranged.'

The actual writer of the letter was not quite at ease, but he consoled himself with the reflection that Sir Sydney Cheston's amazement

in Staffordshire could not greatly affect him in the United States. George wasn't going back to England, if he knew it. He sate half-listening to his host's anticipations and plans, half-thinking out his own scheme for dropping his host at the right point. He was fully made up on that easily-decided question of going back to England. The fear of recognition was multiplied there a thousandfold; here it was minimised. And, besides that, America was undoubtedly a better place to get on in than England.

But, in spite of these excellent reasons for avoiding England, he was doomed to go there; and a chain of events, which may be very briefly summarised, dragged him thither with a force beyond all his powers of resistance. First link:—in the absence of his host at business, young George went gambling. Second link:—he lost, and was absolutely cleaned out. Third:—he was compelled by Joe's discovery to admit the truth. Fourth:—Joe paid for his passage by the cars to New York, and for his passage by the steamer to Liver-

pool; and, detecting an extraordinary and inexplicable desire on the young man's part to cut and run, he watched him like a hen with one chicken, and gave him no opportunity for escape.

So they landed in Liverpool together; and behold, whilst Joe was looking after the luggage, young George made a bolt with a solitary portmanteau, which belonged not to himself but to his host; and Joe, to his amazement and chagrin, was left to face Great Britain alone. He was both mortified and bewildered, for it did not yet occur to him that his chance acquaintance was a pretender. He decided at last that his old chum Cheston kept a tight hand upon this younger brother, and that the lad was afraid to face him after his American extravagances.

'But he must have thought poorly of me,' said Joe, a little bitterly, 'to fancy that I should split upon him.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE terrible text ate deep into old George's heart; but remorse is not penitence, and he suffered all the unholy pangs of the one, and had none of the blessed pains of the other. He was not even safe from detection; and it is possible that if he had been, the fires of conscience would have burned less dreadfully. He was getting to be old, and, what with his troubles and advancing age, he began to suffer pains and disabilities which were hard to bear. Eating and drinking used to be pleasant, and were so no longer. To a stupid man like old George it is hard to lose the pleasures of the table; much harder than for another who has sources of enjoyment outside the range of the coarser senses. He had been used to work hard and to sleep soundly, and now work had no relish and night no rest worth talking of.

Altogether, his road was thorny and full of fears.

Things went on for two or three weeks in pretty much the old fashion, when one day, as he sat alone in his private room, pipe in mouth, staring at the fire, a knock came to the outer door, and a minute later his housekeeper followed her own tap, and came in with a visiting-card pinched between finger and thumb in a corner of her apron.

'A gentlemen to see *you*, sir,' said Mrs. Bullus.

'Show him in,' said the old man, and took the card uninterestedly. It fell from his fingers as he read 'Mr. John Keen, Solicitor, Wrethedale.'

He groped darkly on the floor to recover it, and seemed to grope darkly in his own mind to discover a meaning for it. John Keen entered; and the old man, still feeling blindly for the card, looked up at him, with a face reddened by stooping, and lack-lustre eyes.

'Good day, Mr. Bushell,' said John, with formal politeness.

George ceased his blind search for the card and sat up, breathing somewhat thickly.

'Good day, Mr. Keen. Take a cheer. To what am I indebted——?'

'I do not suppose you will find me a welcome visitor, Mr. Bushell, when you know my business. You may remember a statement made to you with regard to the identity of your late private secretary.'

'Eh?' said old George. 'Say that again!'

'On the day on which you gave George Banks into custody,' said John, slowly and distinctly, 'you received a visit from the lady who was supposed to be his sister.' Old George said nothing, not having it in him to say anything just then; but he glared at his visitor with fishlike eyes, in which there was no speculation. 'She told you the real nature of the relationship between them, and you professed to disbelieve her.'

'I said it was a pack o' lies,' said the miserable old rascal, 'an' I say so now.'

'Very well, Mr. Bushell,' said John, businesslike. 'I am a lawyer, as you know. I am

engaged by Mrs. Joseph Bushell to proceed against you for the recovery of her rights, and I am in a position to prove her claim. Here,' said John, producing a pocket-book and leisurely opening it, 'is a copy of the certificate of marriage between your nephew Joseph and Miss Dinah Banks, solemnised at Waston Church. Whatever property your brother Joseph possessed at his death was, in the absence of her husband, legally hers, and is still legally hers. There is no difficulty in the world as to the completeness of the proof, and I should advise you to make a judicious surrender.'

'Oh!' said old George with a heavy jeer, though his heart was muffled and his head was whirling, 'you'd advise me to mek a judicious surrender, would you? That ain't cool at all, that ain't. Is it? Oh, dear me, no!'

'Mr. Bushell,' said John, copying a line from poor dear Sir Roger's torturer-in-chief, 'perhaps you would be surprised to hear that the original certificate of the marriage has been stolen from the register at Waston Church? 'The old man's jaw dropped; he laid a hand on each arm of his

chair, and made as if to rise; but his limbs refused to obey him, his face turned purple, and the veins in his temple stood out like cords. 'Excuse me for a moment,' said John, and, rising, he opened the door. 'Come this way,' he called to some one outside.

The sexton entered, twirling his hat in both hands, and looking amazingly uncomfortable.

'Is this the gentleman who came to Waston Church a week or two ago, and asked to look at the register of marriages?'

'That's the gentleman, sir,' said the sexton.

'Is this the gentleman who gave you a shilling to drink with?—the gentleman whom you left alone in the vestry whilst you went out to get a pint of beer?'

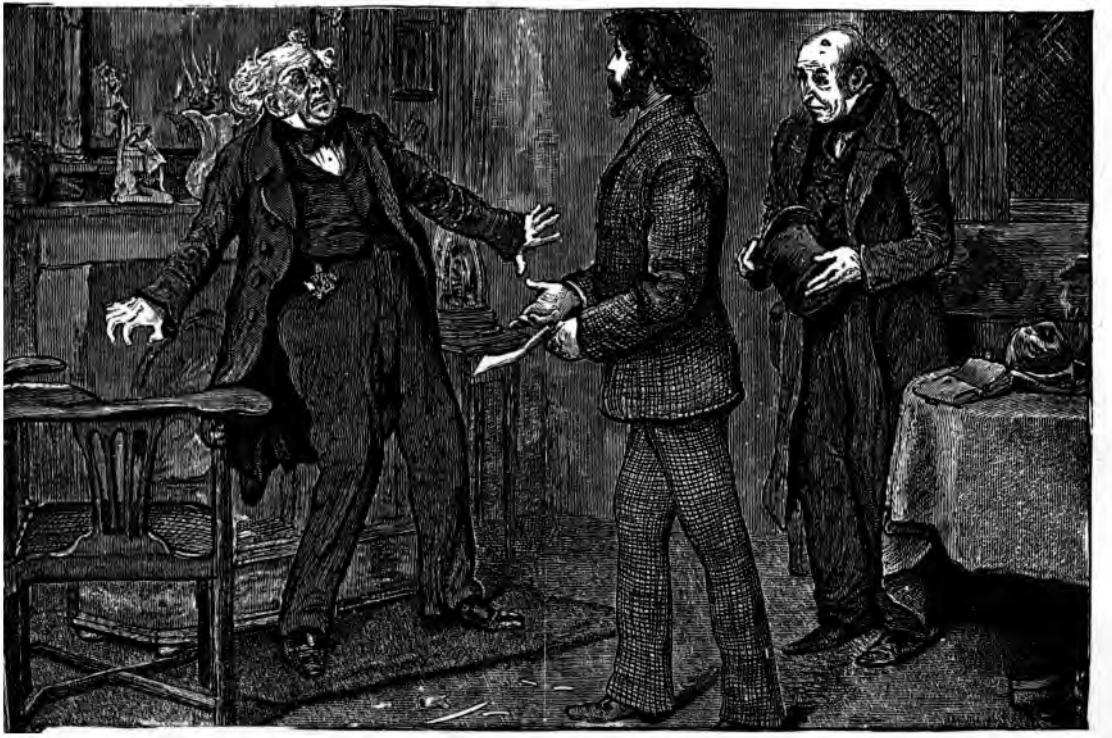
'Yes, sir,' said the sexton; 'that's the gentleman, sir.'

'It's a pack o' lies!' cried the wretched old man, struggling to his feet. 'As sure as there's a Heaven above us, I never set eyes o' the man afore in all my born days. I'll tek my oath on it.' A judgment? A sudden judgment from the Heaven he had invoked so wickedly? His

head swam round and round; he felt with wandering hands for a support, and found none; there were splashes of alternate ink and fire in the silver mist which shut out everything about him; his muffled heart strove to beat as if the struggle would burst it. But he was desperate despite these fears. 'I swear it,' he stammered, groping blindly. 'It's a pack o' lies!'

He had only time once more to feel, with an access of his pains and terrors, that he had anew defied the threatened judgment, when down he went with a crash, striking the back of his head against the fender. John fell upon him, dragged him on to the hearthrug, tore off his stock, and, with one nervous effort, ripped his shirt open from collar to waistband. The old man had been drinking again; and the lawyer, seeing a carafe of water on the table, seized it, and began vigorously to splash at George's face.

'Ring the bell,' he said to the sexton. The man, who was horrified at the result of his identification of old George, fumbled at the bell-pull for nearly half a minute before he could command his trembling fingers, when he rang



such a peal as brought the housekeeper in with a rush and an excited whirl of petticoats. 'Your master has fallen down in a fit,' said John, still dashing water into the unconscious face. 'Send for a doctor, without a minute's loss of time.'

Mrs. Bullus rushed from the room, screaming 'Jane!' and, the maid appearing, despatched her, with a flea in her ear. Jane fled weeping and breathless, and by good hap being recognised by the medical man was followed by him. For what with breathlessness and the terror and resentment inspired by the housekeeper's unprovoked assault upon her, the maid was speechless. The doctor appeared, somewhat winded, for he was a man of rather pursy habit, and unused to the display of pedestrian power.

'Hillo, Keen!' he gasped. 'You here? What's the matter?' He was kneeling by old George's unconscious figure before the question was answered.

'I brought him very disturbing private news,' said John, kneeling beside the surgeon and speaking in a low tone, 'and he has had a fit over it.'

'We must get him to bed,' said the surgeon;

and by his orders a sheet was procured and with some difficulty got under old George's solidly made frame. John Keen lifted at one side and the sexton at the other. The surgeon took the patient's head and the housekeeper his legs, and in this order they stumbled up-stairs with him, and laid him down. Then all but the surgeon and the housekeeper waited without to know the skilled man's verdict, and by-and-by it came. Whether severe or slight the doctor was not yet certain; but there was concussion of the brain, and old George would see to no business, howsoever important, for a while to come.

'I suppose I needn't tell you,' said John to the sexton, 'that it will be a great deal wiser in you to hold your tongue than to talk about these things.'

'*I* shan't say nothink,' replied the sexton.

John had no other reason for secrecy than his desire to keep Dinah's name out of the public mouth; but his caution was not wasted on the sexton, who was more than a little timid as to the possible result of his own share in the matter. When once the young lawyer had written to

Dinah, apprising her of Mr. Bushell's sudden illness and its result of delay, he found time hang heavily on his hands. He had no desire to encounter any of his old acquaintances just then, so he went into Birmingham, and putting up at an hotel there, awaited the doctor's decisive opinion on the case. He blamed himself for the precipitancy with which he had brought old George to bay, and told himself that he might much more reasonably have explained the evidence to him. In short, like other people, he felt wiser after the event than he had been before it.

Two or three days went by, and the doctor was not sanguine. Mr. Bushell had no relatives to consult; and the medical man, acting on his own initiative, brought in a great physician from the neighbouring great town. The physician was no more sanguine than the surgeon; and, after lingering for a week, John went back to Wrethedale, leaving instructions with the surgeon to wire to him in case of any decisive alteration either way. Being arrived at home, he hastened to inform Dinah of his return, and

she called upon him within an hour of her receipt of his message. He laid her marriage certificate in her hands, and explained the whole result of his journey. Dinah turned pale and shook a little as she read through the document, but she did not say much.

'It was a pity I didn't know o' this before, Mr. Keen.' That was all.

'A great pity,' said John, commiserating all her troubles. 'But there is no doubt of your legal title to the property, and no doubt that you will get it.'

She took the certificate home and showed it to Ethel, who kissed her for sole congratulation. It was not easy for Ethel to congratulate Dinah upon anything yet, though she read the mother's heart and sympathised with her. The days went on, and no decisive news came of old George's state. John learned that he had recovered partial consciousness, and that he seemed to have a half-memory of the fact that some trouble had befallen him. But out of this state, so the doctor's letters said, he had slipped back again into complete oblivion, and it was, and would be for

a long time to come, impossible to rouse him to the discussion of any affairs, howsoever important they might be. The doctor's letters, indeed, though cautiously expressed, seemed to lead to the conclusion that old George would never attend to business any more. In course of time that view was partly disproved, but for the present there was nothing to do but wait. The criminal's sentence had more than half its time to run, and before he could be freed it was ten to one the matter would be decided in some way.

So on that side affairs necessarily stood over. Far away in New York the released convict had encountered his father, and had gone away to San Francisco with him, and had returned to England—against his will—with him, and had finally deserted him at Liverpool before old George was fit to be spoken to, or had clearly recalled to mind the cause of the mischief which had come upon him.

Never in his life had Joe Bushell felt so forlorn as when he stood alone, after the lapse of more than five-and-twenty years, on English soil; not even when for the first time the sense

of conscious loneliness descended on him aboard ship. There were resolves in him then, and high hope, and he was going, in spite of all failings and follies behind him, to be a man, and to make a home for Dinah. And how had he fulfilled the promise?—how clung to the hope? Bitter questions, that brought sad answers in an echo—How?

He had made a fortune; not so much as he had left behind, not a fourth part so much, perhaps, yet still a fair handful of money: and of what use was it to him? He ought to have known better than to believe in that story of Dinah's marriage. He ought to have returned to England—he ought never to have left home—he ought to have acted like a man, and not like a cad and a coward.

There are few of us who have not played the fool, few of us who have nothing to confess, nothing of which to be absolved by devout penitence, nothing to have scourged out of us by human forgiveness. But there are not many of us who for a quarter of a century have crushed a heart that ought to have been happy. And Joe was a good-hearted fellow, kindly and gen-

tle, always ready to do a kindness, and never, in spite of youth's hot blood, willing to damage anybody. He had begged pardon of the Reverend Paul in his heart a thousand times, and of his old chum Cheston. And as for Dinah, she had been to him, notwithstanding her light forgetfulness, something quite outside the sphere of common things and common people. He had never fallen in love again, and had lived apart from her in such chastity as few men—very few—have a right to boast of. There was some selfish comfort there, perhaps. If he could get a sight of her, only for a moment, and could breathe to his own heart the words, 'I have been as faithful all these years to your remembrance as you have been to mine,' it might have something of a balm in it for the sore future which he saw before him. But, look at it as he might, life seemed a poor business. Tragedy, and folly, and commonplace! Commonplace, folly, and tragedy!

So he stood like an alien on English ground, and wished himself back in his Western home again. Yet, being where he was, he must go on and fulfil his purpose. He wrote from an

hotel in Liverpool that night to Cheston, saying nothing yet of Master George's desertion of him, and, without waiting for an answer, he started.

I have left you to fancy Sir Sydney Cheston's sensations on reading the letter of his *soi-disant* brother. Cheston's imagination, never very vivid, left him helpless at this time, and he was at first unable to conceive any possible circumstances under which it could have been written.

'What the dickens—?' he began, and stopped again, feeling—like the famous American—unequal to the occasion. 'Who the deuce——?' he began again, and again he failed. 'Why in the name of——!' There was nothing big enough to conjure with in a case like this. It was the most bewildering and amazing thing he had ever met with in his lifetime. 'My dear old Syd!' and 'your affectionate brother, George!' The audacity of the confounded thing! Who ever heard the like? And all on a sudden he leaped at something very like the truth. Was Joe Bushell alive after all, and had he met some impostor out there who was trading on a good name, and who professed to be a brother of his?

Weeks went by, and he heard no more of the matter until he received Joe's letter, when he instantly and impetuously wired to Liverpool and followed his telegram. But his old friend had started before the telegram was despatched, and the two had a day at cross purposes. The returned exile, leaving his traps at a Birmingham hotel, drove over to his friend's house, and learned from the butler that Sir Sydney had gone to Liverpool. Cheston about the same time found that Joe had left his hotel and had taken train for Birmingham. There was nothing for either of them but to turn back again, Joe leaving his temporary address in the butler's hands.

Everything leads to something, and the baronet's impetuous rush hastened matters in relation to this history. John Keen was staying in the same hotel with the returned wanderer. Neither of them had ever seen the other, and neither had the thinnest ghost of an idea of the other's importance to him. John had received intelligence of a revival in old George, and was bent on taking advantage of it, if that were possible.

The two were alone, at the fall of a dismal and rainy evening, seated at extreme distance from each other in a big coffee-room, when in burst a man who glared round in the dusk of the place and went out again.

'I beg pardon,' said the stranger, rising and advancing a step towards John Keen. 'Can you tell me if that was Sir Sydney Cheston?'

'It was,' said John; and the stranger made a dash after the baronet.

'Cheston!' he shouted down the corridor.

Back came the impetuous Cheston.

'Who's that?'

'Don't you know me?' asked the wanderer.

'Let's have a look at you,' cried the baronet, dragging him to a window. 'By gad, it *is* you, after all! Bushell, old man, I'm *glad* to see you. Confound it all, I *am* glad. Why, Joe, old boy, we'd given you up for dead this five-and-twenty years. Where *have* you sprung from? Got a private room? I should have known you anywhere!—anywhere! You're deuced little changed—deuced little. Have you dined? Where's the bell? Well, I *am* glad to see you.'

Shaking hands the while, Cheston shouted this welcome at top of his cheery voice. Joe's eyes were a little dim and his throat was husky.

'It does a fellow's heart good,' said Joe, 'to see an old face again. How *are* you?'

All this was in John Keen's hearing, and the young lawyer sat like one petrified. Here, then, was the wicked wanderer back again! John had his theories, like other people; and, from the moment when Dinah had completed her story, he had made up his mind about errant Joe. There was no doubt in his mind that young George got the black patch in his heart from his father. A better woman than Dinah, John confessed that he had never known. He would and could believe no ill of her; but he had a great faith in breed, and he believed that out of an honest father and mother came honest children, and no other. Thus, Dinah being in John's eyes a paragon of womanly virtues, and her son being an arrant rascal, it was necessary to suppose that the lad inherited his villany from his father. And the father had undoubtedly been a bad lot. He had left his wife widowed

all this time, had never written to her, never troubled his head about her, and, after inveigling her into a secret marriage to begin with, he had with low cunning carried away her marriage lines, and left her to bear the burden of a most undeserved and bitter shame.

So John Keen, when the first shock of amazement was over, made no ado about the matter, but, rising in cold wrath, he walked quietly along the room and tapped Joe on the shoulder.

'Forgive me, Sir Sydney, for interrupting this meeting with an old friend.'

'Hillo, Keen!' said Cheston. 'Didn't see you. How are you? See you in an hour or two. I'm engaged just now.'

'One moment,' said John. 'Are you,' turning to Joe, 'the son of Joseph Bushell and the nephew of George Bushell?'

'I am,' said Joe, speaking somewhat hardly, since he recognised hostility in the questioner's tone.

'You ran away from home in eighteen-fifty?'

'I did,' said Joe. 'What then?'

'I have something for your private ear, sir,

which I will trouble you to listen to at your earliest convenience.'

Cheston stared from one to the other.

'May I ask you who you are, and what your business is?' inquired Joe, taking measure of his man through the dusk of the rainy evening.

'My name is John Keen, and I am a solicitor. I reside at Wrethedale, the town to which (as perhaps you know) Daniel Banks and his daughter Dinah have retired.'

'Cheston,' said Joe, looking a little grey, 'there's something in this—something that I ought to know at once. You know this gentleman?' indicated John.

'Perfectly,' said the troubled Cheston, still staring from one to the other. 'But what the dickens is it all about, Bushell?'

'That I have to learn,' Joe answered. 'Wait a moment.' He crossed the room, rung the bell, and returned. 'How long,' he demanded of John, 'will it take you to make your communication?'

'Ten minutes,' said John in answer.

'Very well,' said Joe; and at that moment

the waiter entered. 'Waiter, show this gentleman to a private room,' pointing to Cheston. 'And, Cheston, you'll order dinner, won't you? Let it be a good one,' he said with ill-assumed vivacity. 'Here! We'll leave it with the waiter. Get the best dinner you can as soon as you can. You'll excuse me for ten minutes, won't you?'

'Certainly,' said the Baronet, with his welcome and jollity somehow chilled within him. 'I'll go into the smoking-room. You'll find me there.'

'Very good,' said Joe. 'Dinner for two in a private room. Have a fire, and make things cheerful. Plenty of candles. No gas. And get a good dinner, and be sharp about it. Now, sir, I am at your service. This way, if you please.'

John followed, and Joe led the way into his bedroom. There he lit the gas, started a cigar, motioned John to a chair, and waited for him. He read enmity in the young man's manner, and was at a loss at present for the ground of it.

'A few months back,' began John, 'I was made the repositary of a secret. A lady for whom I entertain a profound respect came to me, and on very weighty grounds confessed that the name she bore was not her own, and that she was not, as everybody who knew her supposed her to be, a single woman, but had long been married, and that the young man who passed as her brother was her son.'

Joe's cigar went out, and he arose with a trembling hand to relight it. John went on.

'The lady's husband had deserted her—it is no business of mine to express an opinion on the case, and I will deal only with the facts—a few months after marriage, and had promised, on their parting, to send her the certificate of their marriage. He never sent it. She was ignorant of the world, and knew nothing of the law. She believed that the want of the certificate illegitimised her child and annulled her marriage. Her mother shared in that belief, and entered into a pious fraud with her by which, as they both supposed, the lady's honour would be saved. The child was bred as the

child of his grand-parents, and was brought up in ignorance of his father's existence.'

Joe's cigar was out again, but he made no effort to relight it.

'In time the boy's grandmother—supposed by all except her daughter to be his mother—died, and his mother, unable to claim or exert more than a sister's influence and authority, endured supreme unhappiness. The boy went to the bad, not at once, but gradually. He is at this hour——' Incensed as he was against the deserter of his wife, John needed all his heart to launch the blow. Joe's fictitious gaiety about the dinner had hardened him, and his knowledge of the bitter and undeserved agonies poor Dinah had endured made the loyal-hearted young lawyer almost pitiless to the man before him. And yet, Joe was not like an unfeeling scoundrel; and if ever a bronzed and handsome face looked troubled in the world, so did the face John looked at. Yet it was his clear duty to tell the tale at once, and bring this man home to a sense of his responsibilities. So he tried back, and struck straight out. After a

lengthy pause—'He is, at this hour, in prison for forgery!'

'My God!' cried Joe with a groan. This was his first news of the birth of his son, and it need scarcely be said that it was terrible. The agony in his voice hit the lawyer hard; but he went on sternly, spurred by his partisanship for the suffering woman and his anger at the husband's base neglect.

'He was engaged,' said John, 'as Mr. George Bushell's private secretary, and he signed the name "George Bushell" to a cheque for three hundred pounds. Had he known it, he was legally entitled to the name, and his mother was entitled to the money.'

'Did he know it?' Joe asked almost wildly. There was a gleam of light there.

'No,' answered John. 'He did not know it. But when the news of his arrest came to his mother's ears, she made an appeal to the prosecutor. She laid bare to him the secret of the prisoner's birth, and implored him not to send one of his own flesh and blood to prison and disgrace. He drove her from his

house insultingly, and refused credence to her story. The young man was tried, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Eleven months of that term, or nearly, have yet to expire.'

'My God!' Joe groaned again, and burst on a sudden into weeping so wild and passionate that John was dumb before him. The punishment had come home, then—home. He—he deserved it all, and more than all; and yet it was not his to bear, but hers. He *had* loved her, he *had* loved her. And this was what the white accusing unaccusing face had meant as it haunted his memory all these years. The little, innocent, gay maid—harmless, as harmless as a dove, as unfitted to fight the world as a dove to fight with hawks—and he had left her to this terrible fate! Incredible cruelty and baseness!

The storm raged itself out at last, and he arose from his knees.

'Tell me,' he said brokenly, 'whatever else there is to tell.'

John spoke again, but in a changed voice.

'Your wife confided her secret to one living

creature only—a young lady to whom your son was engaged to be married before the discovery of his crime.'

The listener groaned anew, and once more John paused.

'Go on,' said Joe; 'go on.'

'Her friend advised her that the loss of the certificate was no bar to her right to whatever property her husband's father had died possessed of; and for the sake of her son—to save him from future temptation and misery—she determined to attempt to establish her claim. As a first step she went to Waston Church, and discovered that the register of her marriage had been abstracted.'

'Abstracted?'

'Abstracted; stolen. Suspicion fell upon Mr. George Bushell, as the only person who had known the secret of the marriage, and the only person except your wife and son who was interested in it. It was discovered that he had been to the church to examine the register—that he had sent out the sexton with a gift of a shilling to get a drink of beer—and I confronted

him with the sexton. Before he had fairly heard the charge, he cried out that he had never seen the man before, and fell down in a fit, from the effects of which he has not yet recovered. His illness has stayed proceedings on our part, and your arrival may alter the complexion of things altogether. Mrs. Bushell, your wife, is strongly averse to any prosecution of Mr. George Bushell, and I do not think that any legal proceedings would have been necessary, in any case. As a matter of fact, we had hold enough upon him without having recourse to the law.'

'My father,' said Joe, looking up with an awful face, 'made no will.'

'He made no will, and in your absence his brother inherited everything. That has been a matter of common talk ever since I can remember.'

'And my son is in gaol?'

'Yes.'

'Mr. Keen!'

'Yes?'

'Do me a favour. Dine with Cheston.

Tell him everything. The people tell me he is a magistrate. You can advise together. Are there any means of mitigating the sentence? We might compel my uncle to join in an appeal to the authorities. Talk it over with Cheston. I will join you in an hour or two. Will you do this?'

'I will do what I can,' said John.

Joe opened the door, and John Keen walked out of the room. His opinion of the runaway husband was not yet changed, but it was shaken. And whilst he dined with Sir Sydney, and, to that genial man's amazement, told the tale in full, Joe was kneeling in his own chamber, weeping, with such repentant and atoning tears as most men—God be thanked for it!—have never had the need to shed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

I HAVE said before, though without any special originality, that even a worm will turn. Young George found his companion's watchful and friendly benevolence intolerable. Escape became a necessity, and he fled. He was conscious of some meanness in it, and he knew that his promises of an amended life had scarcely been fulfilled. But then, all along, circumstances had been against him. The change of destination and the change of name had been essentials, and who could have foreseen the dangers they carried in their train? Not he. There was no comfort in the rogue's reflections on the reception Sir Sydney Cheston would be likely to give his guest, or on the questions which would be asked, and the answers which would perforce be given. For young George was one of those who liked to stand well in the

general opinion, and he was keenly sensitive to opinions adverse to himself, even when he was out of the way of them. To do him full justice, he thought what an ass he had been to gamble. Euchre and poker were not his form; he knew next to nothing about them; and if ever he played again at any game of mingled chance and skill, it should not be in a game in which *he* was a learner. And now, to get away from that importunate companion of his, he had been compelled to sacrifice his luggage, and had secured in exchange for it only a single portmanteau, the contents of which would probably be useless to him.

A day or two before the voyage ended, George had approached his travelling companion.

'I say, Bushell,' he had said, with a certain air of graceful regret and reluctance, 'you've acted like a brick to me, and I'm quite ashamed, you know, to ask you for anything more. But old Syd is a pretty tough customer for a younger brother to deal with, and if I have to go to him for coin directly I get home I shall have a

wigging. I don't mind that so much, but he's a good fellow is Syd, and I don't want to vex him. Would you mind letting me have a tenner just to be able to sport a little money in front of him till I can square myself again?'

'Of course, of course,' said Joe; and produced a hundred-dollar bill, which George got cashed by the steward. So that, in spite of extravagances, he was not quite forlorn when he bolted from Joe's overwhelming benevolence.

He did not care about going to any first-rate hostel here, lest Joe should find him again; and so he went to a third or fourth-rate house, and lay there *perdu* for a time until the coast should be clear. Then he took train for Newcastle, and hung about for a day or two, making faint efforts to obtain employment. These were attended with such ill results, in the way of inquiry after references and the like, that he gave them up in disdain. His little stock of money dwindled and dwindled. He was in debt at the house he stayed at beyond his means of paying, and, being

unreasonably bothered for his bill, he took a high tone with the landlord, and assured him with a lofty air that he was troubling the wrong sort of man, that the remittances he expected would inevitably reach him on the morrow, and that he—young George—would never again use the landlord's house in any future visits he might make to the town. The landlord—half suspicious, but half imposed on—consented to wait yet another day; and young George, surmising that in all probability the remittances were already at the bank, whilst his letters had been somehow delayed, went out to see, and forgot to go back again. Joe Bushell's portmanteau and its contents scarcely paid the landlord; but they consoled him partly, and young George went upon his way. From Newcastle-on-Tyne to Durham, to begin with. Whilst his money lasted, he was not the man to deny himself; so he ate a fair dinner, and even indulged in the luxury of a bottle of wine. Then, on the morrow, he discharged his bill, seeing no way to leave the house without having first gone through

that ceremony, and, being nearly cleaned out by this time and in a mood of some depression, he marched out of the town on foot. In a while, the weather clearing and the sun shining out with gaiety, his mood also cleared, and he went along with a sense of exhilaration. He fed at a little wayside public-house, and left the people impressed with the grandeur of his manners and his affability. He wandered on, without aim or prospect, sometimes in absurd good spirits, sometimes gloomy. Days went by, and his last copper was gone; his shirt-cuffs and collar had grown more than equivocal in aspect; his beard had effected a stubbly growth; his clothes seemed all the worse for their good origin, in their dustiness and seediness; his boots began to give way, and he was sinking fast into an abject look which suited his condition. But as yet no very terrible physical troubles had been encountered. The weather was mild and fine—unusually so for the season of the year; and he wandered on in a dull contentment, crossed only now and then with a sense of the coming miseries and

the wickedness and folly of the past. He was really hungry, for the first time in his life; and, nearing a town, he retired behind a haystack, took off his waistcoat, rolled it up into a bundle, buttoned his coat, and ran the waistcoat in at mine uncle's. It realised two shillings; and on this he supped, slept, and breakfasted. In the next town an old slop-seller made a bargain with him—four shillings and a patched workman's suit for coat and trousers, a cloth cap and a shilling for his hat. The five shillings lasted him a day, and he went on aimless and at ease. A day later he landed at the workhouse.

Now, this was something of a blow for him; but he got a certain mental luxury out of it notwithstanding. When he walked into the police station, he was pleased at the look of inquiry his demand for workhouse relief extorted from the accustomed official at the desk. It was a tribute to his gentility. Many a gentleman had come to this condition before. Why not again in his case? He felt a certain stoicism, too, which seemed to do him credit

under the circumstances. There was that curious self-deceptive sense in him which is perhaps only the property of the born pretender; and it was so distinct that he felt an absolute pride in flaunting before the accustomed official eyes the poverty of one so evidently cultured and well-bred. He was audience as well as dramatist and player, and the situation was certainly singular.

Yet, when he had answered the official inquiries, had received his ticket, and got into the street again, he seemed to feel that everybody knew he was going to the workhouse, and he found that sensation oppressive. The policeman had directed him thither, and the road was plain enough; but he dodged about bystreets to avoid observation until he lost the way, and had to ask anew to be directed. He chose to put the question to an old woman; and she in answer raised her hands and said, 'Eh, dear me!' before she gave him the information he needed. That pleased him too, though it was not altogether pleasant. He was evidently a gentleman, or the old woman would not have been astonished.

I have felt over and over again a sort of baseness in telling this young man's story. Can a writer, any more than other people, touch pitch and not be defiled? But let me task your impatience and control my own a little further. I shall have pointed a moral with him before I have done, though he may scarcely have served to adorn a tale.

The gates of the workhouse were vast and prison-like, and they reminded him of recent experiences. After some looking up and down, he found an iron bell-pull and tugged at it with a result so astounding in the way of noise that he was borne down by the exigence of his own summons, and felt abashed when an angry porter came out of a small door round a projecting buttress, and demanded with some asperity to know what the row was about. George tendered his ticket almost with meekness; but when the porter made further objections to the disturbance of workhouse tranquillity, the reduced nobleman began to take a haughty air with him.

'I beg your pardon, I am sure,' said George,

in the most aristocratic-sounding drawl he could command. 'This is my first experience in this line. I shall probably learn bettah by-and-by.'

'Let me see,' said the porter, with his head on one side and his hands in his pockets. 'When was you here last? Jannywerry, I think. Yes; it *was* Jannywerry.'

George surveyed this vulgarly suspicious person with calm scorn, answered his questions with all possible brevity, and followed him into the casual ward like Charles the First on his way to execution—so tranquil his contempt, so resigned his martyrdom.

In the casual ward were already a dozen wayfarers, sitting listlessly on benches near the wall. They looked up when the new-comer entered, and looked down again; and never a word they said, until the porter had disappeared, when one began to sing an unrefined ditty of Moll and Meg, unmeet for ladies. Now, our young nobleman, *Astrea redux*, had never been particular to a shade of morals in a song until now; but he spoke out, after a while, with a very effective drawl:

'Don't you think you might sing that blackguard song to yourself, if you *must* sing it?'

They all looked up again at this interruption, and the singer was palpably discomfited.

'I quite agree with *you*, sir,' said a broken-looking, dirty grey man in a corner. 'I've seen better days myself, and I feel that sort of thing offensive.'

'It ain't quite the thing,' said another; and a confirmatory murmur ran about the place.

'The gentleman'll get used to it bymeby,' said one sturdy tramp.

'I respectfully venture to hope that I shall not,' returned the aristocrat of the tramp ward; and again there was a weary murmur of approval.

At this juncture the porter returned, followed by a professional pauper, who, being a professional, had a natural disdain for amateurs, and treated them with lofty *hauteur* as he handed round blocks of dry bread, and tin cans of a tepid liquid which smelt of rancid bacon.

'If things goes on like this, 'said the sturdy tramp, smelling at the liquid with a distasteful look, 'I shall smash another lamp or two, or rip

my togs up, or do summat, an' get another month. They feeds you ten times as well in quod as they does when you're on the spike.'

'And pray what may the spike be?' asked George with a mighty condescending air.

'Why, this is the spike, my noble sportsman,' said the sturdy tramp; 'an' quod's the shop where they cut your 'air for nothin'. Never been there, I s'pose?'

'Don't take any notice of him, sir,' said the dirty grey man. 'Them as was born in a pig-sty can put up with dirty litter, but I've seen better days myself, and it's easy to see that you're a cut above this.'

'Ye-es,' returned George, 'I hope that's tolerably apparent. This is my first experience.'

'You needn't be so blooming proud about it,' said the sturdy tramp, who alone of the room's occupants seemed unabashed by George's tone and aspect. 'It's no partic'lar credit to be here.'

To this the fallen nobleman answered only by a glance of calm disdain, at which the sturdy tramp chuckled with ostentatious merriment.

George, being really hungry, ate his bread, but eschewed the rancid-smelling liquid, and the dirty grey man, seeing this, begged leave to appropriate it.

'It's warm an' it's wet,' said the dirty man; 'an' that's about all you can say for it. But it *is* a comfort, too, when a cove's as cold inside as I am.'

In this particular workhouse the ordeal by water, made famous some years ago by the Amateur Casual, was not practised, but the tramps were all bundled to bed immediately after supper, in a common room like an ill-favoured barrack. George turned up his nose at the tumbled herden which did duty for linen, and, but for the interference of the professional pauper who saw them all to bed would honestly have preferred to sleep in his clothes. Perforce he accepted the professional's dictum, and undressed; and having, in pursuance of the pauper's orders, rolled his clothes into a bundle with the shirt outside, he got into bed and lay there in the early darkness, indisposed to sleep, and compelled for a while to face his own reflections.

He was not so miserable as he deserved to be, and his chief misery sprang from a bitter resentment to the world, which even now seemed to his own mind to have used him ill. Naturally, with young George self-preservation was the first law of nature; and now that things had come with him to this low ebb, it was full time to think of means for taking the tide again. His father and Dinah were well-to-do, and it was a shame that he should beg his bread whilst people of his own flesh and blood lived in comfort. Yet, they were lost to him. It was impossible for him to go to his old home, to face his late employer, or run the risk of being seen by people who had known him; and how to trace his relatives by any other means he could not tell. Tired of turning over fruitless projects in his mind, he fell asleep, and did not awake until the clanging of a great bell mingled with his dreams, and last night's professional pauper turned up again to awaken the amateur contingent. Then he dressed, and presently, to his huge disgust, found himself face to face with a big pile of stones, on a raised stone bench, with

instructions from the porter to see that he broke that heap up nice and small. 'Like this,' said the porter, producing a sample handful. George went to work reluctantly and clumsily, and hammered with small result upon the stones, but much to the damage of his hands and the stiffening of his muscles. After five hours' labour his work was criticised by the porter, who expressed unqualified disapproval of it in regard both to quality and quantity, but forbore to detain him for the completion of his task. George, with a certain meek grandeur, accepted and consumed his morning's rations, washed in a bucket of water which everybody used in turn, and took his way into the streets of the town. The dirty grey man crawled alongside.

'Which way do you think of going?' he asked.

'I don't know,' said George haughtily. 'Not yours.'

'I know the line along between here and Chester,' said the grey man, unabashed by this rebuff; 'and I can put you up to the coves to go to. A bloke as can patter like you can ought

to make a tidy thing of it if he's only along with somebody as knows the line.'

George capitulated.

'Where are you going?'

The man laid down his route, and the two started in partnership. Their luck varied. The dirty grey man had not boasted in vain, for he knew the road and its inhabitants; but it was not always that George's tale succeeded in melting the heart of his listener. This nicely-assorted pair kept, however, from the workhouse, and there fell upon the younger wanderer's spirit a sort of dull contentment in the life to which he had fallen. He told his tale so often that the true story became mythical and the lie looked true.

But after a long spell of wandering there came upon the companions a time of famine. The old vagrant got out of the line he knew, and in one or two cases mendicancy became dangerous, and they made their way out of some towns double-quick, lest the police should be set upon their heels. Workhouse fare and workhouse labour day after day, and wretched weather from

town to town, until the fallen grandee grew sick and desperate. They crawled along, skirting the borders of the principality, until within a four days' journey of the town of Borton, and at that point young George's piteous aspect and tenor-sounding voice of culture drew a shilling from a charitable maltster. With that shilling George bought, amongst other things, a sheet of letter-paper, an envelope, and a stamp, and in the sickness and misery of his heart found pluck enough to write to John Keen, his old comrade.

'I have nothing to say in excuse for myself,' he wrote; 'not a word to advance in extenuation. But I can have deserved no more than I have endured, bad as I have been, and I beg you for pity's sake to let me know the address of my father and my sister, that I may write to them for a little money to go abroad with and begin life anew. I am destitute, so destitute that I have not eaten a decent meal for a month. My feet are bare, my clothes in rags. I have suffered so much for my wrong-doing that even an enemy would pity me if he could see me. I shall walk

on from here to Borton, and shall arrive there in four days. How I shall live for that four days God knows, but I am compelled to move about from place to place to get workhouse shelter and a casual tramp's poor fare. I implore you to keep this communication secret from everybody, and not to deny my request. Ill as I have behaved, I am sure my own people will not leave me to die in this horrible slow way. I am not worthy to sign myself your friend.

'Your wretched companion in happier days,

'GEORGE BANKS.

'P.S.—Address me at the post-office at Borton.'

Of course it was in the nature of the man that he should water this epistle with his tears, and that he should accept them as a good sign in himself, and their palpable marks upon the paper as a likely means to move his old companion. He posted the letter, and trudged along in brighter weather. With the prospect of a possible and even probable post-office order from John Keen in his mind, he picked a quarrel with

his dirty grey comrade and parted from him, not feeling inclined to share any portion of his gains.

He was trudging along with bent head and sore feet towards the close of his second day of the new hope which sprang from his letter, and was approaching the little country town where lay his refuge for the night. The sun was sinking, the skies were filled with mellow, tranquil light, the upper clouds were golden and the lower all alive with rosy blushes. The town lay before him and below him at a distance of perhaps a mile, its slated roofs shining after a passing shower like silver. As he stood wearily, sick in body, broken and wobegone, with thin tears in his eyes, staring before him at the valley and the little town, a lady came round the corner of the road and walked leisurely towards him without a glance. But as she approached him there broke from his lips such an inarticulate cry, and he shrank on a sudden in such an attitude of shame and terror, that she turned in surprise to look at him, and stood still. Slowly he lifted his face, haggard and bearded, weather-stained and

way-soiled, and the sudden flash of terror and amazement in the lady's eyes told him that, in spite of all the changes which had come upon him, he was known.

The little town a mile away was Wrethedale, and the girl was Ethel Donne.

CHAPTER XXV.

JOE had many things to think of, some about which to remodel his opinions. There was that Uncle George of his, who for so long had figured in his thoughts as a sort of wooden angel, and who now disproved his own desert of praise, and established himself as a quite melodramatic old rascal. It was hard for the returned wanderer to take the kindly, generous, stupid old Uncle George off his pedestal, and set up in his place the cunning, greedy, wicked figure he now began to know. And then Joe had felt himself a little aggrieved by Dinah's marriage, and he had used his grief as a set-off against his own misdoing; whilst after all Dinah had been true, and his falsehood was multiplied a thousand thousand times. Uncle George had his share in that to answer for. For a while, when he began to think of it, Joe was

resolved to have no mercy upon Uncle George, who really had been, within limits, a very wicked old man. But softening thoughts in a little time came to the prodigal's mind. He himself had more need of mercy than even that bowelless old man. Joe had never thought much of George's head, though he had revered his heart, and it began now to seem natural to him that his uncle should have gone wrong under great temptation. And surely the sudden temptation to keep so vast a sum as that which drew on old George was a difficult thing to resist.

'Should I have come home?' Joe asked himself. 'Should I have behaved better if Uncle George had never told that lie about Dinah? The news that I owned the money might have brought me home again, but the thought of Dinah failed to do it.'

He did himself less than justice, as was natural, and was hard upon himself in his own thoughts, as he had a right to be.

More than the hour or two he had specified to John Keen had gone by. It was nearly mid-

night and he still sate absorbed in his own thoughts and memories, when the young lawyer ventured back again and knocked at his bedroom door. Joe appeared in the doorway with troubled face and disordered hair.

'It is getting late,' said John. 'Sir Sydney Cheston would be glad to see you.'

'Very well,' said Joe, coming out upon the corridor.

John led the way to the private room in which Cheston and he had spent the evening, and when the baronet saw his old chum's face he arose in solicitude, and crossed the chamber to meet him.

'This has been bad news, Bushell,' he said as he took Joe's hand. 'I have been telling Keen here that there must have been some powerful motive at work to keep you away all these years. I shan't press you to reveal it.'

'There was only one thing,' Joe answered. 'My uncle wrote to me telling me that my wife had married two years after I left home, and I couldn't come back after that you know. I lived in that belief until I met your brother

George by chance in New York, and he told me the truth.'

'What *is* this?' cried Cheston. 'This about a brother of mine. I never had a brother George!'

'What?' asked Joe in amazement. 'He said he was your brother. He said your father married again. Here,' cried Joe excitedly, pulling out his pocket-book, 'here is his card.'

Sir Sydney took the proffered card and read—

'*Mr. George Cheston, Worley Hall, Staffordshire.*'

'This a queer start,' said the bewildered reader, staring strickenly at Joe, whilst Joe, with as much surprise, stared back at him. 'What was he like?'

'You got his letter?' asked Joe. 'I saw him write it, and I sent my own servant to the post with it.'

'I got a letter,' returned Cheston, 'but who the dickens wrote it is more than I know, and more than I can guess.'

Joe suddenly seized Cheston by the arm.

Was the news he gave me about Dinah—about my wife—was that true?'

'What news?' demanded Cheston.

'That she had never married again.'

'Yes. That was true. I've known her ever since you went away—ever since the day you knocked me down about her.'

The matter was not so serious to Cheston as it was to Joe, and the good-natured baronet could afford an amused smile to that remembrance. Joe sat down, his brown beard crushed against his breast, and stared at the fire.

'It is easy enough,' said Cheston, laying a hand on Joe's shoulder, 'to see why old Bushell wrote that lie to you. I'm afraid that respectable old party has been a bad lot all along. Did he know of your marriage?'

'No,' the other answered. 'He couldn't even guess it. He might have seen from my asking after her in my letters that I was fond of her,' he added simply.

'And invented the tale to prevent you from coming back again to look after her? Perhaps, Mr. Keen,' said Cheston turning round, 'the devil is less black than he is painted.'

John nodded but said nothing. He had learned the story of Joe's departure, partly from Dinah and partly from Cheston, and he began to be able to see that the runaway was not necessarily a hardened villain to begin with; at least he seemed properly sensible of his wickedness and folly now, and he was in terrible trouble through it all. John could scarcely maintain his hold upon that angry scorn which he desired to feel. He confessed that, howsoever deserved the bitterness might be, the wanderer had a bitter home-coming.

'Who *the* devil,' Cheston broke out after a little silence, 'could that fellow have been who gave you this confounded card?'

'I don't know,' said Joe wearily. 'I met him at an hotel. He used to talk about dear old Syd., and he knew my Uncle George, and—and Dinah, and old Banks. He came back with me as far as Liverpool, and then he bolted. Why, I've got his luggage here now!' he cried, suddenly recalling that fact. 'It has his name painted on it. Two portmanteaus and a big chest. He was a good-looking fellow, and if he

wasn't a gentleman, he was a very good imitation of one. There was no humbug about his knowing the country-side, any way.'

'And did he talk about me?' asked Cheston.

'Of course,' Joe answered. 'When I first heard him speaking he was asking some young Englishmen to pay him a visit at his place at home—Worley Hall, in Staffordshire. It was that which made me speak to him.'

'I shall be glad to welcome any friends of his,' said Sir Sydney somewhat grimly. 'Deuced glad. I shall be glad to welcome him if he should call—with a horsewhip!'

'Cheston,' said Joe, rising and pacing up and down the room, 'this is all trivial, and we can talk about it afterwards to our hearts' content. Advise me. What am I to do?'

'About young Banks?'

'About my son! Yes.'

'Keen tells me,' said Cheston, 'that you said something about obtaining a mitigation of the sentence, and compelling your uncle to join in the appeal. There's something in that. You don't doubt the story of his relationship to you?'

Doubt Dinah? No. That was beyond him. He had no doubt of Dinah; but he looked at John Keen.

'I think the thing,' said John, 'as clear as day. I would as leave doubt my own senses as Miss Banks—as Mrs. Joseph Bushell.'

'If the boy is hers,' said Joe, 'the boy is mine.'

'Do you intend to return to her?' asked Cheston.

'Great heaven, Cheston!' Joe exclaimed. 'What can you think me? Go back to her now, after leaving her alone and broken-hearted all these years? Go back to her, and give her the extra misery of knowing that I was alive all this time! No. I'm not the man she loved and married. No. She wouldn't know me if she saw me. Give her definite news that I'm dead, and let me find this unhappy lad of mine and take him away with me back to the West, and teach him to be honest, and leave him enough to keep him so. I can do that much good at last, perhaps.'

He spoke with difficulty, but in so simple

and direct a way, and with a repentance and mournfulness so real and apparent, that for a minute they left him unanswered.

'His mother,' said John after this pause, 'would not be content to lose him so. At least I think not.'

'It's a terrible business, Bushell,' said Cheston, laying both his hands on Joe's shoulders. 'Make the best of it. Go back to your wife, declare yourself, promise to do the best you can for the lad—make whatever atonement for your past mistakes you can.'

'No,' the prodigal answered, 'I can't do that. I can't be so mean as to go back again and offer her the mere fag-end of a life. No, no!'

'Fag-end of life be hanged!' cried Cheston. 'I'm a young fellow yet, and we're of an age within a month or two. You've happy years before you, man alive! Do your duty, Joe, and earn 'em, and have 'em and enjoy 'em!'

'You don't understand,' said Joe, returning Cheston's friendly gaze mournfully. 'I couldn't quite tell you myself what brought me over, but I know what I want now.'

'What do you want?'

'To spare her all I can. Everybody has believed me dead for years. It would only bring her a new trouble to know that I was alive.'

'Suppose that, believing you dead, she should be induced to marry again! Eh? And suppose that when the step was taken any accident should reveal the fact that you were still living? Would that be sparing her?'

'Don't urge me now,' said Joe hesitatingly. 'Give me time to think. And think for me. I am only certain of one thing. Whatever seems best for her comfort and peace of mind I shall try to do.'

There was no doubting that he meant this, and Cheston was compelled for the time to let the subject fall.

'And now,' Joe resumed, 'I can go to-morrow to my Uncle George, and frighten him into making enough over to Dinah to satisfy her heart's best wishes—if money could do it.'

'I am afraid that if he saw you just at present the shock would kill him,' said John Keen.

'What *can* we do?' Joe cried. 'Does my boy know who he is yet?'

'No,' from both of them.

'I'll go and see him,' said Joe, forcing himself against an awful inward terror and reluctance. 'We can appeal to the Government to mitigate his sentence. You'll help me, Cheston?'

'I don't think I'd try to see him at first,' urged Sir Sydney. 'I'll help you any way I can with all my heart and all my might. We might appeal, though there were circumstances—— Yes; we might appeal.'

'What circumstances? There was nothing —worse than I know?'

'Well,' said Cheston, reluctantly, 'his defence was his worst condemnation, Bushell, and that's a fact. He swore it was all a plot to ruin him, and he gave his sweetheart a part of the money in bank-notes, and when she came into the box he sung out that she was in the plot with the rest, and the poor girl fainted. It made people angry, you know, and it increased the prejudice against him.'

At this renewal of his memories the baronet

walked abruptly to the other end of the room, and there, under his breath, he let out a curse against the criminal, and then returned. Joe stood dejectedly looking at the floor.

'What can we do?' he asked again. 'Has anybody seen him since——?'

'No,' said John, 'I think not. Old Daniel—his grandfather—was so cut up by it that he sold the Saracen and went away to Wrethedale. I had some trouble,' he continued, with something of the old hang-dog air upon him, 'in finding out where he had gone, for he communicated with nobody, and left the place quite suddenly.'

'Cheston,' said Joe doggedly, 'I shall go and see him. It's clear he has been a scoundrel. So have I, and there's a pair of us. Like father, like son. If I'd have stayed at home and done my duty he'd never have been tempted.' John recalled Dinah's words, for Joe was thinking Dinah's thoughts. 'I'll begin to do my duty now, please God!' Joe said humbly, 'and I'll go and see him to-morrow. You're a magistrate, Cheston. How can I set about it?'

'I can help you if you are bent upon it,' said his old companion. 'I am a visiting justice for the county. Shall I go with you?'

'Will you?' asked Joe. 'Thank you.'

They all fell into silence, until after a long pause John arose and said good-night. Sir Sydney at this arose also.

'You'll want to be alone a little while, Joe? Eh?'

'Yes,' said Joe. 'I shall see you again, Mr. Keen. You will keep my confidence in the meantime until it is decided what to do.'

'Certainly,' John replied, and went his way, his old prejudices against Joe Bushell and his new prejudices in his favour fighting each other.

'You're set on going to-morrow, Bushell?' asked Cheston.

'Yes. You'll come with me?'

'If you wish it.'

'I do wish it.'

'I will come. Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

Joe was alone again with his own thoughts.

Ah—in his case too—to have seen to-day with to-morrow's eyes. There is no wisdom like that. But which of us has it? If he could have foreseen! But he had at least begun to learn in these late days the one lesson which in itself comprises most human wisdom worth the having—and that is that in any complexity and all complexities of human life the thing to do is not that which looks easiest or most clever, but that which is most honest. Patiently to find out the right thing to do and then to do it seemed all the hope left him in the world. And there are some of us who go along in high feather who have hopes less bright than this.

It seemed to the home-coming prodigal's conscience the clearest of duties to see this unknown fallen son of his without delay, and without delay to set to work for his amendment. He lay awake planning for this newly-found child, whom he had never seen and who was a felon. He wept awful tears about him and the hapless mother so long deserted. Whatever he had suffered in the past—and remorse

had for many a year been busy with him—was nothing to this last punishment, and the healing but terrible fire of it lay in this—that he who had most deserved to suffer had suffered nothing.

'I have wired,' said Cheston when he met Joe in the morning, 'to say to the Governor that I am leaving here by the 10.15, and that I particularly desire to see him. I have asked him to meet me at the railway station. He knows me very well, and I have no doubt he will oblige me by coming.'

Joe said 'Thank you,' and no more.

They breakfasted in silence, and in silence set out upon their journey. Cheston read the 'Times,' and Joe communed with his own thoughts. The baronet's surmise was right, and the Governor of the jail was at the station to meet the train.

'I am immensely obliged to you,' said Cheston, shaking him by the hand with hearty cordiality. 'Will you walk up with us?'

'We are all happy to oblige Sir Sydney Cheston,' said the Governor.

'This is my friend Mr. Bushell,' said Cheston. The Governor bowed and made way for the two to pass through the station door. Cheston, drawing one arm through the Governor's and another through Joe's, went on: 'We are deeply interested in one of the prisoners under your charge, one George Banks.'

'George Banks,' said the Governor, 'is not under my charge any longer, Sir Sydney.'

'How's that?' asked Cheston, stopping short in his walk.

'Well,' said the official smilingly, 'I suppose your interest a friendly one?'

'It is assuredly,' Joe answered.

'In that case you will be pleased to hear that his sentence was some time ago commuted by the influence of a most warm-hearted friend, who exerted himself with the Secretary for the Home Department, procured the young fellow's release, and sent him out to Melbourne.'

The two friends, standing in the roadway with the Governor between them, looked across at each other in amazement, and the Governor himself, naturally pleased to have produced

such an effect so easily, smiled as he gazed from one to the other. Cheston was the first to recover.

'Who was the benefactor?'

'Well, Sir Sydney,' returned the Governor, still smiling, 'but that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison-house I could a tale unfold. Ha! ha! ha!' He was again naturally pleased at having fallen on so apt a quotation. 'The fact is,' he added, 'that I am in a measure bound to reticence. The young man's friend was one of those people—very rare in my experience—who do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.' The Governor was again delighted with himself at having found so apt a quotation, and again he showed it. 'He asked me,' continued the smiling official, 'in terms which I can scarcely disregard, not to reveal his share in that meritorious enterprise. I believe, gentlemen, that for once I have seen a practical Christian, and that practical Christian was the man whose influence released young Banks from prison.'

He spoke with pleased warmth upon this

topic, but looking from Joe's face to Sir Sydney's and from Sir Sydney's face to Joe's, he read no answering smile.

'I assure you, sir,' said Joe, with a gravity before which the Governor's smile died away, 'and Sir Sydney Cheston will assure you, that we are here upon an enterprise of no common importance. It is vital to me to know this young man's whereabouts. If you will give me the name of the man who did this good deed, I pledge you my word of honour that I can and will exculpate you to him, and could and would if you had been sworn to secresy a hundred times.'

'I don't think it is possible,' said Cheston, 'to exaggerate the importance of my friend's request, either as regards himself or young Banks. Melbourne's a wide word. The young fellow may have gone anywhere from Melbourne, and we might chase him in vain for years.'

'It can injure nobody,' Joe broke in again, 'to let me know who has anticipated me. My purpose,' he added, 'in coming here was to

set afoot a plan for the mitigation of his sentence. Will you help me to find him?'

'It's for the young fellow's good,' chimed in Sir Sydney; and between the two the Governor hauled down the flag of resistance, and in the act struck the pair dumb.

'Well, gentlemen, under the circumstances I suppose I am justified; at least I feel so. The gentleman who procured young Banks's release, who fitted him out for the world anew, who gave him a free passage to Melbourne and two hundred pounds to begin the world again with, was'—he paused to give effect to his announcement—'his original prosecutor, Mr. George Bushell.'

To say that his hearers were astonished is to say nothing. The Governor had intended a surprise, but seeing dimly that the effect he had produced multiplied his hopes by a million or thereabouts, he also became amazed, as a man might, who, suddenly closing a door to startle you, should find that he had slammed the house down. Cheston and Joe could only stare in blank wonder, and the Governor, discomfited

without knowing why, looked helplessly from one to the other. At last Cheston burst into almost hysteric laughter, stamping to and fro about the street.

'I beg your pardon,' he gasped after a minute or two, holding Joe's arm and looking at him through tears of laughter. 'I wouldn't wound you, Joe; I couldn't help it.'

'The villain!' cried Joe, finding his tongue.

'The amazing old serpent!' said Cheston, asping still. 'Machiavelli was a fool to him.'

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